FOREWORD

By Mr. Wilfried Lemke
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Sport is indisputably one of the world’s most popular leisure activities and it describes a fascinating phenomenon: people from all over the world play, attend, watch, listen to, talk about, experience and even feel sport at all levels of performance. Sport is often described as a language which everyone in the world can understand and speak, and which is able to emotionally combine and unite groups. On an individual level, sport has the capacity to develop people’s strengths and faculties.

That is why the UN family, governments, NGOs, development agencies, sports federations and social entrepreneurs have increasingly been harnessing the power of sport as a low-cost and high-impact tool in their humanitarian, development and peace-building efforts.

The deliberate use of sport, physical activity and play as delivery mechanisms in social and humanitarian work has experienced a significant increase in scope and recognition over the past decade or so. In September 2000, the UN Millennium Summit brought together the largest gathering of world leaders in history. In the summit’s final declaration, signed by 189 countries, the international community committed to eight objectives, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In 2003, the UN Inter-agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace published their report entitled “Sport for Development and Peace: Towards Achieving the Millennium Development Goals.” The report explicitly stated that “well-designed sport-based initiatives are practical and cost-effective tools to achieve objectives in development and peace” and that “sport is a powerful vehicle that should be increasingly considered by the United Nations as complementary to existing activities.”

Today, sport can no longer be considered a luxury within any society but rather it is an important investment in the present and the future, particularly in developing countries. Sport and play are fundamental rights that must be respected and promoted worldwide.

Since I was appointed as the UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace in March 2008, I have been visiting a number of developing countries and communities, and witnessed first-hand how sport for development projects are used to bridge divides and attract youth for education and development.

In Sri Lanka for instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is implementing the country-wide project ‘Sports for Peace (S4P)’. This project uses sports to bring different ethnic communities: Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim to play, connect and celebrate together, thus overcoming political, cultural and linguistic boundaries. The programme also works towards the training of sports coaches to develop their skills and strengthen their roles as active mentors for the Sri Lankan youth.

Another project in the slum of Mathare in Nairobi, Kenya, which has benefitted thousands of young girls and women, uses football to create awareness about harmful diseases and teach important life skills of leadership, in a effort to make them responsible citizens of society and thus helping to achieve the MDG no. 3 of “promoting gender equality and empowering women” & no. 6 of “combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases.”

Over and above this, sport has the power to attract large audiences and can play a major role in communicating positive awareness messages on key issues and thus driving social change. The ‘Think Wise’ campaign, a joint initiative by the International Cricket Council (ICC), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), uses the power of cricket to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. The project uses key sporting events and cricket stars to raise the awareness and implement community-based cricket initiatives to provide young people with important life skills.

To conclude, I would like to congratulate the Magic Bus India Foundation on their commendable initiative in connecting SDP practitioners and supporting the dialogue among them. On behalf of the United Nations, let me encourage all the actors in the Sport for Development and Peace movement to keep harnessing the unique power of sport and using it to further the push towards sustainable international development.

About UNOSDP

The United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP), based in Geneva and supported by a Liaison Office in New York, provides the entry point to the United Nations system with regard to Sport for Development and Peace, bringing the worlds of sport and development closer together. The Office assists the Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace in his worldwide activities as an advocate, facilitator and representative of sport’s social impact in a development context.

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