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## Press Release SG/SM/9579

### **UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF SPORT BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER, TEACHES TEAMWORK,**

### **TOLERANCE, SECRETARY-GENERAL SAYS AT LAUNCH OF INTERNATIONAL YEAR**

Following are the remarks delivered today by Secretary-General Kofi Annan at a Headquarters press event to launch the International Year of Sport and Physical Education:

I see we have a full house today, but also we have an interesting line-up for you. We are all here for one great cause, the International Year of Sport and Physical Education.

Sport is a universal language. At its best it can bring people together, no matter what their origin, background, religious beliefs or economic status. And when young people participate in sports or have access to physical education, they can experience real exhilaration even as they learn the ideals of teamwork and tolerance. That is why the United Nations is turning more and more to the world of sport for help in our work for peace and our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 2005 to be the International Year of Sport and Physical Education. I would like to thank Ambassador Hachani of Tunisia for sponsoring the resolution and for his country's strong support for these efforts. The United Nations Fund for International Partnerships also merits recognition for the important role it plays in fostering sports-related programmes in developing countries. And last year, my Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace, Adolf Ogi, along with Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, co-chaired a task force that gave us an excellent report on how to maximize our use of sport for UN objectives.

Most of all, I want to thank two great champions for being here with us today to launch the International Year.

First, Roger Federer of Switzerland, who is the number one tennis player in the world. Roger, we all appreciate your presence here despite your very demanding schedule.

The next one is Margaret Okayo of Kenya, who won last year's New York City Marathon. You wouldn't know it, looking at her, but she did win the marathon. I don't think most of us could even finish it. But she did win it, and I know we all wish her luck when she defends her title on Sunday.

Both symbolize the strength, perseverance and values that the International Year seeks to promote. Both, I am glad to say, are friends of the United Nations. And both, as effective spokespersons, will help us reach people throughout the world, particularly the young people, and make the International Year a winner for all of us.

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