

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS AT THE 126TH SESSION
OF THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE SESSION Sochi, 6 February 2014**

(As prepared for delivery)

The eyes of the world are on Sochi this week.

Athletes, television cameras and fans from around the world are ready for the momentous 2014 Winter Olympics.

All of you have helped to make these Games possible.

I thank the Government and people of the Russian Federation, the organizers and all the residents of this great region for their hard work and preparations.

I particularly commend President Putin's commitment to peace, unity and development through sports.

I applaud the IOC and the Olympic community for uniting the world here in Sochi.

President Bach, as this is my first time meeting you in person after your assumption of the presidency, I am pleased to once again offer my warmest congratulations on your election.

Your Manifesto, "Unity in Diversity," rightly states that, "We urgently need solidarity in order to achieve true universality, to give a fair chance to each and every Member of our Olympic Family ... and to keep us free of discrimination of any kind."

Since you are already an Olympic Gold medallist, I am confident you will deliver many wins for our global team.

That team – the United Nations and the IOC –are not competing on the ski slopes or skating rinks. We are joining forces for our shared ideals. Sustainability. Universality. Solidarity. Non-discrimination. The fundamental equality of all people.

The Olympics show the power of sport to bring together individuals regardless of age, race, class, religion, ability, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Different groups are meeting on the playing field, not the battlefield.

In my work, I attend many events that bring together countries on the issues of war, poverty, disasters and other problems.

Today I am in Sochi to witness countries uniting in a spirit of friendly competition and goodwill.

I repeat my call for all warring parties to lay down their weapons during the Games – and to lift their sights to the promise of peace.

The United Nations General Assembly has repeatedly called for reviving the centuries-old tradition of an Olympic Truce. I applaud and strongly support this valuable initiative.

The athletes here carry the flags of different nations – but they are all joining under the banner of equality, fair play, understanding and mutual respect.

Their histories, traditions and day-to-day lives offer a wonderful parade of human diversity. And the athletes send a unified message that people and nations can put aside their differences.

If they can do that in Sochi's sporting arenas, leaders of fighters should do the same in the world's combat areas. The Truce called for unanimously by the General Assembly can enable life-saving humanitarian relief to reach suffering people. And it can create an opening to lasting peace.

As Secretary-General of the United Nations, I again urge all warring parties to respect the Olympic Truce – especially in Syria, South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

I know you are strongly committed to this idea and I look forward to joining you in promoting the Truce and spreading this message far and wide.

Honorable Members of the IOC,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have been privileged to travel to many countries over my many years of public service. In every single one, sport and physical activity are part of life.

The popularity of sport transcends all barriers.

Sport has an amazing power to spontaneously unite people as one in solidarity.

As one athlete put it, "We all speak football."

The United Nations is harnessing this enormous force for progress.

Our vision to leverage the valuable power of sport for peace and development enjoys the full support of all United Nations Member States. And the IOC itself has Observer Status at the United Nations.

I am proud to be the first Secretary-General to have travelled with an IOC President to our joint projects in the field.

The Olympic Youth Development Centre in Zambia I visited with former IOC President Jacques Rogge is helping thousands of young people. I will always remember one sixteen-year old youth named Ben. You may think I remember him so well because his name, Ben, sounds like my name, Ban. But he made an impression on me for a different reason. Before we met, Ben was caught up in life on the streets of Lusaka. Now, with a safe place to play and skills training, he is working toward his dream of becoming a doctor.

Ben is just one of many young people around the world who demonstrate the value of investing in sport for development and peace.

The General Assembly has recognized this. Last year it designated April 6th as the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace.

This Day was chosen because it marks the opening of the first Olympic Games in modern times.

This new international observance is a sign of the increasingly close relationship between the United Nations and the IOC.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Now I turn to how we are working together to promote development and peace through sports.

More than a dozen UN entities have signed agreements with the IOC.

The UN Environment Programme, UNAIDS, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the UN refugee agency, the UN Population Fund and UNESCO are just some of the entities working with the IOC for progress in their respective areas.

We are working together to promote physical activity and improve health. We are encouraging young people with opportunities to engage in sports. And famous athletes are lending their star by bringing hope to troubled areas.

The Olympic Movement also promotes human rights, including the rights of all persons with disabilities, working closely with the Paralympic Committee.

The Paralympic Games are an essential part of the Sochi Winter Games.

I am one of millions of people inspired by those athletes.

The Olympics have served to break down negative stereotypes and build positive attitudes. I am pleased that the United Nations counts many Olympic athletes as champions of our causes – peace, development and human rights.

These efforts are all helping to advance the Millennium Development Goals, our targets for addressing poverty, disease, environmental degradation and inequality.

Sport is so actively linked with the MDGs that last April, when we marked the 1,000th day until the MDG deadline, I did so on a football field at a match between Real Madrid and Levante in Spain. My jersey had an unusual number – 1000 – to symbolize our commitment to reaching the MDGs within a thousand days.

My Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace, Mr. Wilfred Lemke, is doing excellent work in building partnerships to advance our common goals.

The Youth Leadership Programme which he has spearheaded shows how young people can engage in their communities through sport.

We can do even more to use sport to advance the MDGs – and contribute to our longer-term development agenda.

Sports can help empower women.

Just think – for the first time in the history of winter Olympic Games, women will compete in ski jump. Of course, you will not see me at the top of the ski jump. But I will be cheering for women to jump as high and leap as far as their talent will take them. This is women's rights in action, and we have a responsibility to build a platform for women to jump.

Sports also promote health – including by addressing obesity, diabetes and other non-communicable diseases.

President Bach,
Distinguished IOC members,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Sports can help advance human rights.

Last year, the United Nations marked the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination by focusing on the power of sport. We are all aware of the need to combat ugly and hurtful racist displays at sporting matches.

And this past December, the theme of Human Rights Day was “Sport comes out against homophobia.”

Many professional athletes, gay and straight, are speaking out against prejudice.

We must all raise our voices against attacks on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex people. We must oppose the arrests, imprisonments and discriminatory restrictions they face.

I know that Principle 6 of the Olympic Charter enshrines the IOC's opposition to any form of discrimination.

The United Nations stands strongly behind our own "Free and Equal" campaign, and I look forward to working with the IOC, Governments and other partners around the world to build societies of equality and tolerance.

Hatred of any kind must have no place in the 21st century.

Sports can also promote sustainable peace and offer hope to fragile communities.

I was deeply moved by a video screened at last month's humanitarian pledging conference for Syria. It featured a 13-year-old Syrian boy named Abdullah, who lives in a refugee camp in Jordan. He spends his time gathering stale bread to sell to farmers who use it as animal feed.

Abdullah got the idea to organize a football team with his friends. These young Syrians do not have much more than a soccer ball. Their lives have been tragically derailed. But the game of soccer gives them at least some sense of normalcy – a chance to play, which is their human right.

We are working hard to bring in relief supplies to all people affected by this horrible conflict – and to end it through a political solution. We are striving to address many other cases of senseless violence in our world, to heal those who have suffered and to prevent future outbreaks of conflict. The Olympic movement is our great partner in this effort.

The United Nations will continue to partner with the IOC to build a better, freer and more equal world. I count on your engagement and your support. Let us work together to make this world better for all.

Thank you.