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Sport for Peace: The Winning Difference

Remarks of Dr. Jacques Rogge President, International Olympic Committee to the United Nations 31 October 2007

Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,

I am honoured to speak to you today on behalf of the International Olympic Committee. Thank you, Mr. President, for extending the invitation. Thank you, Mr. Liu Qi, for introducing the resolution entitled, “Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal.” I am grateful to this august body for adopting it.

As you know, the resolution is based on the Olympic Truce, for which you have shown overwhelming support over the past 14 years. The Olympic Truce was born in the 9th century B.C. in ancient Greece. It called for warring parties to lay down their arms while athletes competed under the flame of the Olympic torch.

Your endorsement of this concept reflects the universality shared by the United Nations and the Olympic Movement. The presence of the UN as a force for good is felt in more countries than ever before. So it is with the Olympic Movement. Today, athletes from 205 National Olympic Committees compete in the Olympic Games. And today the IOC provides more assistance to developing countries than ever before, often in collaboration with many UN agencies and other international partners.

That is why I hope the widespread support for this resolution speaks not only for its symbolic value but also for its practical potential. Sport alone cannot enforce or maintain peace. But it has a vital role to play in building a better and more peaceful world.



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Sport is an important tool for international development. Sport helps bridge cultural and ethnic divides, promotes tolerance and non-discrimination, reinforces social integration, and advocates healthy lifestyles.

Sport is more than competition. It promotes mutual understanding. It facilitates dialogue. It builds bridges between communities in conflict. Sport fights discrimination. It raises awareness about women's rights and issues. It builds self-esteem and interpersonal skills, especially among young people and women. Sport helps the healing process in populations overcoming trauma. It delivers hope to countries ravaged by war, poverty and disease.

Sport unites the principles that the Olympic Movement holds dear—education, sustainability, non-discrimination, universality, humanism and solidarity. These are also the principles at the core of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. These are the principles that drive far-reaching social change.

Guided by these principles, the IOC and the UN have created an impressive record of collaboration. We have joined together to find solutions to a wide range of social, economic and environmental problems.

We have launched an important prevention campaign against HIV in collaboration with UNAIDS.

Through sport, the UN and the IOC have rallied thousands of citizens in many countries devastated by war.

We have launched a pilot project in Zambia to train and educate youth through sport.

At the grassroots level, we have provided basic sports equipment and recreational activities to tens of thousands of people in impoverished and rural areas in many countries.

We have donated sports and casual clothing to refugees on three continents.

All these activities are in addition to the important relief efforts we make for victims of disasters—be they earthquakes, hurricanes, flooding or the tsunami—in collaboration with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent.

We also work hard to reduce the environmental impact of the Olympic Games. We were honoured this year to receive UNEP's Champions of the Earth award.

Finally, in one of our most recent development projects with the UN, we established the Sadili Oval Sport & Nature Camp in an extremely poor area of Nairobi. What better place to teach deprived youngsters about the thrill of active sports and the importance of maintaining the environment?



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Mr President, participation in sport is a right that every human being should enjoy without hindrance, in just the same way that children enjoy playing. More than ever, sport is a universal language. It plays the role of catalyst in today's society. It improves the quality of life and well-being. Through sport we can share a common vision of a better world.

In China, the Beijing 2008 Summer Games have already delivered important social, legislative and economic benefits. It is better to open a new door to China than to leave it closed at this point in its modern evolution.

The 2008 Summer Games will reach one-fifth of the world's population in China alone. It is predicted that four billion people—the most ever—will watch the Beijing Games. This is a wonderful opportunity for China and the world to witness the Olympic values in action—to see firsthand the excellence, friendship and respect that sport brings to life, to witness the harmony, understanding and peace that sport can engender.

These values are at the heart of the Olympic Games. They reflect the universal ethical principles that drive the Olympic Movement. They demonstrate who we are and what we stand for.

As such, doping is incompatible with our values. We are grateful to have UNESCO's support in ratifying the International Convention against Doping in Sport. It advances our drive to eliminate doping through a legally binding document.

In a world where values can change with circumstances, ours do not. Fair play and good sportsmanship show our respect for sport in its purest and cleanest form.

In a world where commitment to social responsibility wavers, it has always mattered to the IOC.

In a world too often torn apart by war, environmental degradation, poverty and disease, we see sport as a calling to serve humanity.

That is why this resolution is so important.

Mr. President, honourable delegates, thank you for continuing to place sport at the service of mankind. I further urge you to recognise its special importance for youth in building character and promoting good health and strong values.

Like the Olympic Games themselves, the impact of this resolution goes beyond borders. Beyond religion. Beyond cultures and languages. Beyond politics. Through sport and the values it represents, we can all make a winning difference and inspire a peaceful society that preserves and nurtures human dignity.

Thank you.



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