

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Plenary meeting of the General Assembly on agenda item 11, “Sport for
development and peace: building a peaceful and better world through sport
and the Olympic ideal”
13 November 2017**

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Dear Colleagues,

I want to start my statement today by acknowledging that sport is not always associated with the United Nations. This is understandable. The things that happen on a tennis court or a running track look very different to what we are doing, here.

However, there is, in fact, a strong link between sport, and the values and work of the United Nations. Today’s meeting gives us an opportunity to reaffirm this link.

I want to make three points in this respect.

First, simply put, sport can bring people together.

It is founded on universal values. These include discipline, fairness, and respect for opponents and rules. We might speak different languages, or have different customs or viewpoints. However, once we step out onto a field or court, we are all part of the same system. In this way, sport can be a universal tool, which can promote both peace and unity.

The United Nations has used this tool, particularly through its peacekeeping missions or country teams. Sport has helped to open doors into the communities the United Nations is serving. It has been used to build confidence and trust in post-conflict settings. And it has played an important role in the reintegration of ex-combatants, including child soldiers.

No, sport alone cannot stop conflict or bring about peace. But, I believe that a football, or a puck, is a better peacekeeping tool than a gun. It costs less money. It can build, rather than destroy. It brings people together, instead of sending them fleeing for their lives. And it invokes enthusiasm - not fear. I am confident that the United Nations will continue to use this tool in its work on the ground.

The second point I want to make is that the Olympic Games and the United Nations aspire to the same ideal. This is an ideal based on humanity. It says that, no matter what is going on in state capitals around the world, people will always have a space in which to engage and connect.

This space can be the finish line of an Olympic sprint. Or it can be a hall like this. Whether athletes or diplomats, we must use these spaces. We must show that humanity can triumph over politics.

The last point I want to make relates to youth. Sport can offer young people a platform for empowerment. It can give hope for a brighter future. It can allow young people to build

capacity in strategic thinking, teamwork and leadership. And it can provide a route out of under-development and poverty.

More and more, the United Nations is working to engage and empower young people all over the world. We must reach out to young people in a way that will resonate with them. Sport offers a major opportunity in this respect. We have already seen some success, through the mobilisation of athletes and sports teams to promote the Sustainable Development Goals. We should work to support, replicate and expand these examples.

Excellencies,

To conclude, I want to stress that there is a link between sports, and the values and work of the United Nations. It is a link that we should do more to strengthen.

This is why we should warmly welcome Olympic gold medalist, Ms. Kim Yuna, to the UN General Assembly today.

And this is why we should seek out opportunities to support and use sport as a driver of peace, development and humanity. A major opportunity will arise in February, when the 23rd Olympic Winter Games are to be hosted in the Republic of Korea. It is more important than ever to reaffirm the ideals of the United Nations, and the Olympic Games, in the Korean Peninsula. We must seize this opportunity.

Therefore, I want to express my best wishes to the Republic of Korea as you host the 23rd Olympic Winter Games. I look forward to being in Pyeongchang myself next February to participate in the Games. And I call on all countries to participate in the 2018 Winter Olympics. Let us demonstrate once again the power of sport to bring us together and to overcome political, cultural and historical divides.