



Remarks

by

H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe

President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

Inaugural International Day of Sport for Development and Peace

“Celebrating Sport for Development and Peace”

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Excellencies,
Secretary-General,
Dr. Thomas Bach, President of the International Olympic Committee,
Distinguished Guests and Athletes,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

Say the names Bolt, Schumacher, Pele, Piggott, Tendulkar, or ask the question, “*Who will win the next football World Cup?*” and immediately the room becomes energised as people of all ages, ethnicities and cultures find common ground. Throughout human history participation in and spectating at organised sporting events have been amongst the great pleasures of human existence. Paintings in a Mongolian cave dating to early 7000 BC depict a wrestling match with attentive spectators, while at Beni Hasan in Egypt, monuments to the Pharaohs dating to 2000 BC display depictions of fishing, wrestling, weightlifting, long jump, swimming, rowing, shooting, athletics and ball games.

Sport has the potential to span the gamut of the three pillars of development providing wholesome social activity that brings people together, creates valuable revenue streams for many, lifts people out of poverty, allows for upward social mobility, generates decent work for sportspersons and those engaged in the maintenance of venues or the production of food and sports paraphernalia.

For many of us, sport has always been an important part of life and also plays an important role in the lives of the young. It is easy to see the value added by sport to society and the economy, friends, families and communities and to the countries of the world. It is for these reasons that both sports and music are regarded as universal; they both have the ability to bring diverse persons together in peace and can contribute positively to sustainable development.

The value of sport has been recognised and reiterated in many of our General Assembly resolutions and UN documents. Beginning in 1993, over twenty years ago, our Assembly adopted a resolution calling for the observance of truce during the

Olympic Games; and the Assembly commemorated the first International Year of Sport and Physical Education in 1994. In many ways, the virtues of sport are an ideal match for what we seek to achieve here at the United Nations. At its best, sport fosters unity, encourages participation and inclusion, advances human rights, and promotes peace and development. Indeed, the benefit of sport extends even further: sport can teach adults and children alike essential values such as effort, dedication, patience, fair play, respect for others, cooperation, and team spirit; it promotes health and well-being through physical activity, and for many, it can be a gateway to education or better personal opportunities.

In the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, Heads of State and Government recognized the ability of sport to foster peace and development. In 2010, the High-level Meeting Outcome Document of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) declared that [quote] “sport, as a tool for education, development and peace, can promote cooperation, solidarity, tolerance, understanding, social inclusion and health at the local, national and international levels.” [End quote]

The football World Cup, which is arguably the most popular competition in the world, likewise draws diverse crowds from countries and cultures across the world. The so-called “beautiful game” of football inspires deep loyalty and commitment from fans, gives millions of young girls and boys a dream, keeps many of us glued to our television sets and, I happily admit, either elates us – if our favourite team wins, or plunges us into despair – when that team loses. Perhaps the universality of sports is best recognized through the shared passion of the Olympic Games. The United Nations, the International Olympic Committee and countless athletes, professional and amateur, all over the world have had a rich and meaningful collaboration in this regard. In 2012, this universality and the potential of sport and games to serve the cause of peace were duly recognized when for the first time all 193 UN Member States co-sponsored the Olympic Truce resolution.

Because of their universality sporting events continue to attract an ever-growing public, and athletes are increasingly using their fame, celebrity status and extensive social networks to advocate for social change, the common good, peace and development. Many of them are lending their voices to the UN and its agencies,

helping to draw public attention to discrimination against women and girls, the plight of people suffering exclusion, living in poverty or caught in the grips of conflict. As we prepare to usher in a new development paradigm to succeed the Millennium Development Goals after 2015, we hope to be able to count on the voices of athletes worldwide to put the spotlight on our new development goals, as well as to set an example by embracing sustainable practices.

Indeed we must also continue to explore the many ways sport can contribute to sustainable development and poverty eradication. From the development of green sport installations to the inclusion of marginalized populations, from the sustainable production of sport equipment to the creation of decent jobs in the sport industry, from the empowerment of youth to supporting reconciliation efforts, sport can bring us closer to our developmental objectives at the international level. It is my hope that as we inaugurate this international day, it will serve as a global reminder and source of unity around the concepts of peace and development with sport as the nexus.

At many levels therefore, it gives me great pleasure and satisfaction to take part in this inaugural International Day of Sport for Development and Peace. Today, on this first International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, I call on all Member States, athletes, sports' fans and citizens worldwide to honour and perpetuate the values and finest traditions of sport in support of our global efforts to create a peaceful and prosperous world for all.

Thank you.
