

31 October 2007

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim,
President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Joint Debate on Sport for Peace and Development**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to warmly welcome Mr. Jacques Rogge, the President of the International Olympic Committee to the General Assembly, and Mr. Liu Qi, the President of Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad.

Today, the General Assembly will hold a debate under agenda item 49, 'Sport for peace and development', and consider draft resolution A/62/L.2 regarding the contribution that the Olympics can make to this overarching goal.

Excellencies,

In 2005, World Leaders committed to promote sports role in creating peace, achieving the Millennium Development Goals and improving public health.

The convening power of sport is unsurpassed, even by the United Nations. While the UN has 192 Member States, the Association of National Olympic Committees has 205 members. As the President of the Beijing Organizing Committee, Mr. Liu Qi, rightly pointed out: The UN and the Olympic Movement are natural allies.

Sports help to break down social, religious and ethnic barriers by promoting tolerance and mutual understanding. Sports can change lives for the better by building self-esteem, leadership skills, community spirit, and bridges across ethnic or communal divide.

When teams and individuals come together to share their common passion for sport, everyday differences are set aside. Rivalries remain, but they are fought over goals, fastest times or longest jumps. Sporting spectacles provide the opportunity to transcend everyday differences for crowds that come to enjoy them.

This is the embodiment of the ancient Greek concept of ekecheria, or "Olympic Truce". The General Assembly considers this concept to be an important part of promoting international understanding and maintaining peace.

That there are over 180 co-sponsors of the draft resolution on “Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal” (A/62/L.2) is a testament to the universal nature of sport and its importance in human society.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate China for the honor of holding the 24th Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008. The main themes of the Games - “a Green Olympics, High-tech Olympics and a People’s Olympics” - are strongly support by this House. I have visited recently the Olympic sites and was very much impressed with the pride and the enthusiasm with which Chinese people are constructing them.

Excellencies,

Sport contributes to economic and social development. It improves health and personal growth in particular for young people and provides real alternatives to violence and crime.

The United Nations works closely with the International Olympic Committee to develop strategic partnerships with the international sport community to promote education, health, HIV/AIDS prevention, gender equality, environmental protection, peace and reconciliation.

The Secretary-Generals report entitled “Sport for development and peace: progress and prospects” (A/62/325) sets out many concrete example of initiatives that Member States, United Nations funds, programmes and agencies, NGOs and the private sector have undertaken to promote this agenda to implement the three year action plan nationally and internationally.

I would like to commend those Member States that have reported concrete steps to enhance national policies and strategies that advance sport for development and peace, including by addressing gender equality and women’s empowerment.

I would also like to note the work undertaken;

- by DPKO in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia to use sport to bring previously warring factions;
- by UNFPA working with national governments and sports associations to use sport as a vehicle to promote life skills and responsible sexual behavior to prevent HIV/AIDS; and;
- UNDPs work to mobilize resources to achieve the MDGs in Africa, Asia and Latin America by organizing Football Matches Against Poverty; and, in Burundi, Rwanda, Sri Lanka and Indonesia where sport has been integrated into post-conflict and humanitarian programmes.

However, the Secretary-General recommends a more systematic follow-up by all Member States and UN bodies to more effectively use sport as a tool to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and greater recognition of its value to promote healthy lives and peace.

Excellencies,

If we are going to build a world with greater tolerance, mutual understanding and peace sport must continue to be used to channel energies away from aggression and self-destruction and into learning and self-respect.

This is the essence of the Olympic ideal.

Thank you.