

23 August 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
on the Adoption of the International Day of Sport for Development
and Peace**

Mr. President of the International Olympic Committee,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor to preside over this meeting of the General Assembly, at which we will adopt a historic resolution proclaiming April 6th as the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace.

At the onset of my remarks, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Ambassadors Madame Isabelle Picco, Permanent Representative of Monaco, and Mr. Mohamed Khaled Khiari, Permanent Representative of Tunisia, for their tireless efforts to secure consensus on its wording.

On behalf of the United Nations, allow me to welcome and extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. Jacques Rogge, the President of the International Olympic Committee, and to pay tribute to the broad legacy of achievement during his twelve-year tenure at the helm of the IOC, including the attainment of Permanent Observer status at the UN in 2009.

For his distinguished contributions to the world of sport and beyond, we owe him a large debt of gratitude.

Last, but certainly not least, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am proud to acknowledge the presence of my nation's most favorite son, the world's number one men's tennis player, Mr. Novak Djokovic.

His accomplishments on the court have been widely recognized. But more importantly, I believe one can draw inspiration from his personality and strength of character, his steadfastness of purpose, and his fortitude to persevere.

Allow me to use this opportunity to congratulate him once more on having received the Arthur Ashe Humanitarian of the Year Award, in recognition of his charitable work and the role he plays as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador.

We look forward to following his remarkable career for many more years to come.

Excellencies,

Sport's significance for the improvement of an individual's character and a society's welfare traces its origins back to the very dawn of our civilizations—to pharaonic Egypt and ancient China.

It was the classical Greeks, however, who began to place sport at the very center of their identity, establishing the Olympic Games some two and a half millennia ago.

The “quadrennial celebration of the springtime of humanity,” as it has been called, gave participants the opportunity to reach for greatness and to achieve their *aristeia*—the ‘finest moment.’

Victors' heads were adorned with olive wreaths and red ribbons were tied around their hands—symbolizing the banishment of weapons from the Olympics.

These rituals were performed out of respect for the command of the Oracle at Delphi to practice peace through sport, codified through the law of *ekecheiria*, or ‘sacred truce,’ which enabled athletes and spectators alike not only to travel to the Games safely, but forbade anyone to make war during the time they were taking place.

The Olympic Creed was inspired by the words of the Greek philosopher Epictetus: “the most important thing in the Olympics is not winning, but taking part; the essential thing in life is not victory, but contesting well and nobly.”

To this very day, this immortal phrase represents the true essence of the Olympic spirit.

Excellencies,

In many ways, sport is an embodiment of humanity's most valiant characteristics. It requires perseverance and discipline, engendering the principles of personal integrity, fair-play, and honorable competition, inspiring us to push ourselves beyond limits.

In Lord Tennyson's unforgettable verse, “to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”

I believe such words help frame the universal values of sport, which in contemporary times the United Nations, together with the IOC, has sought to promote.

In 1993, the General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for the observance of a truce during the Games—intending not only to halt hostilities between belligerents, but also to strengthen international efforts to promote peace and reconciliation between Member States.

In 2010, at the High-Level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals that was held hereat UN Headquarters, heads of state and government adopted a landmark resolution that acknowledged sport as a powerful tool in achieving the MDGs.

Across the globe, sport programs have been used to deliver HIV/AIDS prevention messages, help curb obesity rates, promote children’s and maternal health, and further gender equality.

The resolution before the Assembly today builds on these initiatives, in recognition of the fact that sport has a unique power to attract, mobilize and inspire people around the world.

It can also serve as a formidable development tool. As the General Assembly takes further steps to define the post-2015 agenda, I hope the values inherent in sport will inform our deliberations on how to define the SDGs. I would like to extend an appeal to Member States to come together at this crucial moment and fulfill the tasks set by world leaders in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, directing the world on the path of sustainable development.

Excellencies,

In establishing this International Day, let us pay tribute to the great legends of the past, whose athletic achievements, character, and moral fortitude have earned them a place of distinction in the pantheon of Olympic glory—champions such as Jesse Owens, who defied fascist ideology through his stunning victory in Berlin in 1936.

Let us also honor our contemporary heroes and the sporting values they personify. They ignite the sentiments of hope and possibility, reminding us of the splendid potential of humanity.

And let us express deep esteem for the para-athletes who, in their quest for sporting distinction are bravely defying disabilities and defeating negative stereotypes.

Excellencies,

Sport can be a powerful handmaiden for peace and reconciliation. It can bring us closer through shared celebration of achievements of universal appeal and attraction. Ethnic, religious and economic divisions fall by the wayside, along with prejudice, fear and misunderstanding.

In the words of the greatest living statesmen, Nelson Mandela, a heroic figure whose political legacy and moral weight has left a lasting mark on our times: “sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire and unite people in a way that little else does.”

Young and old, male and female, rich and poor—every match, every competition, represents a new opportunity to triumph. The stadium, the swimming pool, the dusty local pitch—such sites are transformed into places where greatness is within reach for all, where purity of endeavor is on full display, and where any individual’s abilities can be seen and admired without reservation.

In effortlessly throwing asunder all human barriers, sport is indeed the world’s universal language.

Thank you very much for your attention.