

**Introductory remarks by Carolyn Hannan, Director  
United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women**

**Conversation on women, gender equality and sport**

**To launch the UN Division for the Advancement of Women publication  
“Women 2000 and Beyond: Women, gender equality and sport”**

**Organized in collaboration with  
The International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG) and  
WomenSport International (WSI).**

**United Nations, New York, 28 February 2008**

It is my pleasure to welcome all participants to this conversation on women, gender equality and sport. We are delighted to have so many stakeholders in the area of women and sport present to share their experiences with us today to launch the United Nations publication: *“Women 2000 and Beyond: Women, gender equality and sport.”*

We are particularly pleased that the two organizations which collaborated with the Division for the Advancement of Women on this publication, International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG ) and WomenSport International (WSI), are also collaborating with us in this event. I extend, in this context, a warm welcome to Johanna Adriaanse and Carole Oglesby.

I am very pleased that the publication: *“Women2000 and Beyond: Women, gender equality and sport”* will be made available through these two international organizations at the upcoming *“IV IOC World Conference on Women and Sport: Sport as a vehicle for social change”* which will be held in Jordan, from 8-10 March 2008.

We are honoured to have video messages from two women ministers of sport, the Honourable Minister Nawal El Moutawakel, the Minister of Youth and Sports in Morocco and the Honourable Minister Dato Seri Azalina Othman Said of Malaysia. This is a most appropriate way to begin this conversation.

Already as early as 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action addressed the issue of women, gender equality and sport. The Platform called for accessible recreational and sport facilities in the education system, workplace and communities and gender-sensitive programmes and support in all areas. The Platform also noted the under-representation of women in decision-making positions in sport.

Articles 10 and 13 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) call for States Parties to ensure the same opportunities for women and men to participate actively in sports, physical education and recreational activities.

The issue of women, gender equality and sport is important for the United Nations. Over the past decade, there has been a growing understanding that sport can be used to promote important development goals in the areas of health, education and employment; and democratic principles, leadership, tolerance and respect and social inclusion.

The United Nations International Year for Sport and Physical Education in 2005 highlighted the power of sport to allow individuals to experience equality, freedom and empowerment, noting that *“the control over one’s body experienced while practicing sport is particularly valuable for girls and women...”*

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### The publication

Allow me to make a brief introduction to the publication.

The publication is based on the principle that it is important to include a gender perspective on all work on sport. The access to, involvement in and benefits from sport for women and girls can only be fully understood through comparison with men and boys. Gender analysis is required to provide information and statistics for effective advocacy, awareness raising, policy development and changes in resource allocations in order to improve the status and situation of women and girls in sport.

While it is important to focus on specific targeted activities on women and sport, particularly where there are significant gaps and barriers to women’s equitable participation and benefits, the overall goal should be to promote equality through ensuring attention to both women and men, and girls and boys, as an integrated part of all sport activities. Men, particularly those in positions of power, have to be involved in the process of change required and take on leadership roles.

The publication highlights that sport provides a myriad of benefits for women and girls and can be a powerful tool for women’s empowerment and gender equality. Sport promotes physical and mental well-being; offers opportunities for developing self-knowledge and self esteem, and for demonstrating ability, skills acquisition and personal achievement, through a process of social interaction. Sport can facilitate development of the sense of ownership of women and girls of their own bodies, which can enable them to make better choices in their reproductive lives.

Through sport, girls acquire new interpersonal networks and access to new opportunities, allowing them to become more engaged in school and community life. They develop skills in communication, teamwork, leadership and negotiation. The skills and values learned through sport are especially important for girls, given that in many

countries adolescent girls have fewer opportunities than boys for social interaction outside the home and beyond family networks.

Because sport was traditionally perceived as a male domain, women's and girls' participation in sport also challenges gender stereotypes, and has thus potential for reducing discrimination and breaking down entrenched attitudes. Girls' participation can also have a significant impact on the attitudes of boys and young men towards gender equality. Seeing girls succeed in soccer, which in many parts of the world is considered a male domain, can lead to boys reconsidering their perceptions of the roles and capabilities of girls.

Sporting events and arenas have been effectively used to get important information for women and girls on their reproductive rights and health and on HIV/AIDS. Sport has also been an effective channel for information to men and boys on gender equality, including on equitable sexual relations and on violence against women.

The publication illustrates that women's increased involvement can also promote positive development in sport - through providing alternative values and attitudes, knowledge, experiences and capabilities. Women's increased participation in decision-making in sport diversifies the talent pool among coaches and managers, administrators, and other officials. Increased numbers of women in key positions can provide positive role models and mentors for girls in sport.

The publication looks at the areas where equality between women and men needs to be strengthened, including participation in activities and bodies and access to decision-making and resources and incentives. It also raises the issue of harassment and violence in sport and discusses the role of the media.

Generally women have fewer opportunities to participate in and benefit from sporting activities and bodies than men. Women and girls do not have access to the full range of activities available to men and boys and do not participate in management and leadership roles to the same extent to men and boys.

It is important to acknowledge that women's and girls' access to and participation in sports have, however, increased over the last few decades. Many important barriers have been broken down and doors have been opened, largely through the persistent efforts of women and girls themselves, including many in this room today.

*We are delighted to have with us some women and girl athletes who are role models for women and girls in sport:*

*Lydia la Riviere Zijdel (Netherlands) - a peer reviewer for the publication*

*Mary Harvey (USA)*

*Keshia Phyllicia Kalamo (Namibia)*

*Mia Kellman (USA)*

The involvement of women and girls in sport varies in different socio-economic and socio-cultural contexts. Some groups of women and girls have additional constraints as a result of race, religion, language, and disability. In developing sport policies and programmes, it is important to recognize the diversity and difference among women.

Despite progress made, there are still significant gaps and challenges in relation to the access and participation of women and girls in sport which must be clearly identified and addressed. Women continue, for example, to face discrimination in official regulations in some international competitions and sporting facilities.

While both men and women can suffer from a lack of safe and appropriate sport facilities, resources and training opportunities, these constraints are often exacerbated for women and girls. For example, the unequal sharing of household and family responsibilities limits their free time. The risk of sexual harassment and abuse makes appropriate timing and location of activities critical. In addition, the lack of female role models and mentors is a significant constraint.

The attitudes of men to women's involvement in sport – as athletes, coaches, managers and officials, broadcasters and sponsors, as well as in the general public - can be a major constraint. Women and girls themselves may not have developed adequate understanding of the intrinsic value of sport and its contribution to personal development and well-being, or of their rights and potential in this area. Many have internalized negative perceptions.

The barriers in access to and participation in sport, including lack of access to technologically appropriate facilities and aids, are daunting for women and girls with disability. Much more needs to be done to increase participation and access at the grassroots and recreational level, which in turn will allow more women and girls with disabilities to proceed to national and international competitions.

Women are still significantly under-represented in decision-making and as leaders in sporting institutions at all levels, including in coaching, management and media, as well as in bodies responsible for events at different levels.

As more women serve in leadership and decision-making positions, their influence as role models has the potential to enhance the participation of women and girls at all levels in the sporting world.

*We welcome the participation today of some women leaders in sport:*

*Carol Garoes (Namibia)*

*Iva Gloudon (University of the West Indies )*

*Rena Kanokogi (USA)*

Women and girls face discrimination in a number of other critical areas in sport. These include access to top quality facilities, training and other resources. Competition opportunities, rewards and incentives, promotion and sponsorship and recognition are

also not provided equitably to women and men. This applies to both contexts involving professional athletes and local contexts involving amateur athletes.

There is still very far to go before women's sports are given equitable treatment in the media, both general media and speciality sports media. The exclusive promotion of male sports idols exacerbate the over-valuing of male athletes and male-dominated sporting activities, compared with women athletes and women's sport. Media coverage can also disseminate negative perceptions of women projected by some male sports idols, which provide questionable role models for boys and young men.

The publication notes that women are frequently described in the media in terms of their physical attributes and emotional responses, often in ways that stress weakness, passivity and insignificance. The marketing and promotion of women's sports can also be highly sexualized. Media coverage of women's sports needs to be increased and prioritized, and the quality and style of reporting significantly improved.

*We look forward to the contributions of a woman sports journalist:  
Donna de Verona (USA)*

Women and girls who engage in sports may face the risk of gender-based violence, exploitation and harassment. The practical logistical aspects of location, timing and transport can be critical. The location of practice areas or competition sites may, for example, involve travel and scheduled practice or competition times may put women and girls at risk of violence if they have to travel after dark. Affordable and reliable transportation, appropriate hours for events and safe sporting locations are important elements for reducing the risks of harassment and violence in sport.

The dominance of men in coaching and management also reinforces traditional patriarchal power hierarchies. The abuse of power by coaches and managers may lead to exploitation and physical and verbal sexual harassment.

The risk of violence may also stem from the fact that the participation of women and girls in sport can challenge existing gender boundaries. Women and girls may face physical and other punishment from families, communities and other actors in sport, who see their involvement in sport as inappropriate.

Issues of violence, exploitation and abuse of women in the context of male sports are also of increasing concern. Male sports can enhance a notion of masculinity based on men's dominance and physical strength, with resulting expectations of power and privilege in relationships with women. As a result, sexual violence committed by male athletes has been unquestioned in some contexts.

*We are happy to have someone here today to share with us information on harassment of women and girls in sport and what is being done to combat this:  
Kari Fasting (Norway) – Kari was also a peer reviewer of the publication.*

The publication notes the efforts that have been made within sports organizations at different levels to promote access, involvement, and benefits for women and girls. This is reflected in the current Olympic Charter, adopted in 2004, which states that one of the roles of the IOC is to “*encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures with a view to implementing the principle of equality of men and women.*”

Sports activities are increasingly supported by development agencies, including the United Nations and bilateral agencies and non-governmental organizations. Initiatives include, as well as projects and programmes, research, data collection, advocacy activities, conferences and workshops and support to networking. It is critical that gender perspectives are fully integrated into these activities. This requires developing a deeper understanding of the benefits of sport for women and girls and the specific barriers they may face in accessing, participating in and benefiting from sporting activities and identifying ways to address them. Many organizations are today working to use sport strategically to empower women and girls and promote their involvement in all development efforts.

*I am delighted that a medical doctor, Sandra Mahecha Matsudo, is with us today to address some of the benefits of sport for women and girls.*

*We are also pleased to have with us today representatives of two organizations working strategically to use sport to empower women and girls:  
Right to Play – represented by Muffy Davies and Lindsay Glassco (Canada)  
UNICEF- represented by Maie Ayoub von Kohl*

The important institutional mechanisms have been put in place at different levels within the world of sport to support the promotion of gender equality work are acknowledged in the publication, such as the IOC Commission on Women and Sport. Conferences and meetings have been used effectively over the past decade. The organizations focused specifically on women and sport, International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG ) and WomenSport International (WSI), have played a critical role. Since 1994, World Conferences on Women and Sport have assessed the progress made, and defined priority actions to increase the involvement of women. I had the honour to attend the Fourth World Conference on Women and Sport, held in Kumamoto, Japan, in May 2006. The declarations of principles and calls for action emanating from these conferences have provided important guidance. Women's roles in sport have become more visible as a result.

*We look forward to the inputs of two participants on the work of the organizations focused on women and sport:  
Johanna Adriaanse (Australia)  
Carole Oglesby (USA)*

The International Olympics Committee has increased its focus on women in sport,

including through the Commission on Women and Sports. In this context, it is exciting to be able to turn our attention to the next Olympics will be held in Beijing in August this year.

*We are therefore delighted that Counsellor Zhang Dan from the Permanent Mission of China to the United Nations will provide us with information on women's participation the forthcoming Olympics.*

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### The organization of the conversation

Let me say a few words on the organization of this conversation on women, gender equality and sport. We will begin with the short video message. The each of the participants in the conversation will be given three minutes to briefly introduce themselves and raise two or three critical issues on women, gender equality and sport. Once each of the participants has made their initial intervention, I will open up for dialogue among them. Each participant can raise their name plate to indicate their request to take the floor to interact with other participants, responding to what has been said, raising questions or making further points.

Further into the conversation, I will open up the discussion to all participants and would then welcome further inputs, questions to participants and comments on points they have raised.

I will not make long introductions to those participating in the conversation as this would take too long. Instead we have prepared a compilation of short bios which will be handed out to you.

I expect that we will conclude sometime after 12.30, to allow you to have time for more informal interaction before we have to leave the room free for the next event at lunchtime. I am sure you will welcome the opportunity to discuss further with this interesting group of stakeholders.

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