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Written statement* submitted by Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 February 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Sports and human rights

The Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni 23 welcomes the summary report on the discussions, conclusions and recommendations of the 2018 Social Forum, held in Geneva from 1 to 3 October 2018 focusing on “*using sport and the Olympic ideal to promote human rights for all and to strengthen universal respect for them.*”¹

In the conclusions of the summary report it is stated: “The values and skills transmitted through sports created unique opportunities for the promotion of peace, reconciliation, understanding and solidarity. Sports were also means for the empowerment and development of groups often left behind and for challenging stereotypes and taboos. Sports and human rights underpinned the national and international drive towards realization of the 2030 Agenda.”²

Sport and Olympic ideals, undoubtedly, can be a mean to promote education, health, development and peace all around the world. They play a major role in respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights for all and are used in the promotion and strengthening of universal respect for human rights.³

The Olympic Charter says “The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.”

The “Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles”. The Olympic spirit “requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play”.⁴

Especially for children, sports and play are opportunities for exercise and learning solidarity, inclusion, non-discrimination and peaceful resolution of conflicts, all ways to build a more inclusive and respectful of human rights society.

Sports and Olympic ideals promote the right to health, right to life, right to peace, right to education, the right to be free from violence and discrimination, the right of the child to engage in play and recreational activities, right of every child to a standard of living adequate for child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, just to mention a few.

Article 2 of the International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport from UNESCO states “Physical education, physical activity and sport can yield a wide range of benefits to individuals, communities and society at large”, for the latter in particular in terms of health, social and economic benefits.⁵ In the situation of inequality or discrimination, for example for children with disabilities, sport can reduce stigma and discrimination both transforming community attitudes and favouring interactions between people with and without disabilities.⁶ Sport helps persons with disabilities inter alia, to become physically and mentally stronger, contributing to their right to health.

According to UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs: “The goals of the United Nations and the Paralympic Games share the same ideals to serve humanity: the UN strives for the peaceful settlement of disputes, social progress and better standards of life, and harmonious relations among peoples and nations, while the goal of the Paralympics is to place sport at the service of humanity, by harnessing its great potential to contribute to the global struggle for peace, prosperity and the preservation of human dignity.”⁷

¹ A/HRC/RES/35/28

² A/HRC/40/72

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/SForum/Pages/SForum2018.aspx>

⁴ https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/General/EN-Olympic-Charter.pdf#_ga=2.66823406.1923867261.1537774177-1653570702.1530864876

⁵ International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport UNESCO

⁶ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/issues/disability-and-sports.html>

⁷ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/united-nations-sports-and-the-paralympic-games-promoting-human-rights-development-and-the-ideals-of-humanity.html>

Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities underlines the importance of sports activity stipulating that appropriate measures shall be taken by States Parties “to encourage and promote the participation, to the fullest extent possible of persons with disabilities in mainstream sporting activities at all levels.”⁸

Sport, if fully accessible to all, has the potentiality to eliminate inequalities and allows the development of everyone’s talents. When children and adolescents are allowed and guaranteed practicing sports and its values (inter alia fairness, teambuilding, equality, discipline, inclusion, perseverance, respect, integrity, excellence, solidarity, fair play and friendship), sport combats discrimination among them and helps to build up more peaceful and inclusive societies in which everyone is included and no one is left behind.

Moreover, sports and physical activities are part and parcel of education, as included in article 29 of the Convention on the rights of the child⁹ in which it is stated that “the education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child’s personality, talent and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”. In fact, according to the Olympic philosophy “learning takes place through a balanced development of body and mind¹⁰”. Moreover, sport has also the capacity of supporting school attendance, and this aspect might be particularly important in deprived and poor settings.

During the social forum we brought the example of APG23 Cicetekelo Youth Project in Zambia that is an emergency and long intervention programme for children living and/or working on the streets. The children cared for by the staff of project, are at the moment 320, male and female, aged between 9 and 22. The project provides also prevention interventions for vulnerable or at-risk children/youths from ending up on the streets. CICETEKELO in Bemba language means HOPE.

The project began more than 20 years ago with the purpose of assisting 33 young boys picked from a dumping site in one of the poorest areas of Ndola, Zambia. Since the very first moment sport, especially football had a really important function. Sport is also a way to escape from the difficult situation that children are facing in the compounds and to fight for a better future.

We would like to echo the words of Pope Francis: “Sports is a meeting place where people of all levels and social conditions come together to reach a common aim. In a culture dominated by individualism and the gap between the younger generations and the elderly, sports is a privileged area around which people meet without any distinction of race, sex, religion, or ideology, and where we can experience the joy of competing to reach a goal together, participating in a team, where success or defeat is shared and overcome; this helps us to reject the idea of conquering an objective by focusing only on ourselves [...] All this makes sports a catalyst for experiences of community, of the human family.”¹¹

⁸ Convention on the Right of Persons with Disability

⁹ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989

¹⁰ <https://www.olympic.org/olympic-values-and-education-program>

¹¹ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180601_lettera-card-farrell.html