

INTERVIEW

Interview with Wilfried Lemke

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Wilfried Lemke, *UN Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace*

UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) has been working in for many years to promote the positive values of sport and to contribute to conflict resolution by means of sportive activity. Currently, UNOSDP is developing projects to enhance dialogue and reconciliation amongst parts in conflict all over the world, from the Middle East to both North and South Korea. We talked about these projects and about the potential of sport as a peacebuilding tool with UNOSDP Special Adviser, Wilfried Lemke.

How can Sport contribute to the promotion of Peace and Development?

Sport contributes to the promotion of development and peace in many ways, but in particular there are three key aspects. First, due to its global reach and popularity around the world, sport possesses an unprecedented capacity to mobilize, unite, and inspire. It is a cost-effective, flexible and powerful tool in promoting peace and development objectives. Second, sport instills positive values for personal and social development. In fact, it rests upon inherent values, such as teamwork, respect, fair-play, and leadership to stimulate sustainable and positive development among societies. Finally, sport promotes ideals of peace, solidarity, and friendship. By bringing people together, regardless of their origins and backgrounds, it creates strong social cohesion and bonds, and facilitates mutual understanding and dialogue. Participants acquire transferrable skills that can be applied to other social areas, to foster further collaborative and positive action.

Which are the projects carried out by UNOSDP for the promotion of Peace and conflict resolution?

The Office has long been using the power of sport to bring people together and supporting sport for peace initiatives from mega sport events to the grassroots level. Together with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), since 1993 the United Nations calls all Member States to abide by the Olympic Truce an ancient tradition originating in Greece in the 9th century B.C. with the purpose of providing safe passage for athletes, families and pilgrims traveling to the Olympic Games. For seven days before, during and seven days after the Olympic Games, in the spirit of peaceful cooperation, participating countries agreed to cease all conflicts.

On 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted by consensus the latest edition of the “Olympic Truce” Resolution. It was co-sponsored by 180 UN Member States’, agreeing to observe the Olympic Truce for a 45 day period from the opening ceremony of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games to the closing ceremony of the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games.

On the grassroots level, UNOSDP launched the Youth Leadership Programme in 2012, in order to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by developing youth leaders and role models in and through sport. UNOSDP continue to encourage dialogue between parties of conflicts such as in the North and South Korea. In July 2014, we invited youth and officials from the two Koreas to the YLP in Gwangju (South Korea), and the Imagine PEACE Youth Camp in Olympia, Greece. This learning opportunity provided the youth with a chance to think about the value of sport and peace. Through UNOSDP’s efforts, the power of sport to help bring people together, build trust and provide a communication platform to the two Koreas has been further recognized

**“ Sport possesses an unprecedented capacity to
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Does UNOSDP work in any way on current ongoing conflicts such as the ones in Syria and the Middle East?

The UNOSDP has played an active role in promoting peaceful resolutions to conflicts in the Middle East. Projects, such as “Extension Building for the Indoor Sports Hall”, implemented in Palestine, seek to empower refugee children and provide safe sporting environments for youth. With this aim, recently, we have supported “Sport for Resilience”, a project implemented by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In 2014, UNOSDP also supported the Diyar Women Sports Centre, a facility that provides women in Palestine with the necessary skills and education required for them to enter the employment market. The construction of this center contributes significantly to the enhancement of sporting infrastructure, human resources and social programmes in Palestine now.

Finally, last February, we welcomed three young refugees from Syria to its Youth Leadership Programme held in Hamburg. In addition to empowering displaced individuals and providing them with sustainable skills for their future, our goal was to also include them within a safe and suitable programme and to encourage their integration into hosting societies.

Since your appointment as a UN special adviser in 2008, which have been the major achievements of UNOSDP?

The adoption of numerous General Assembly Resolutions on Sport for Development and Peace and the recognition of the power of sport as an important enabler of sustainable development in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Also, since 2008, I have established five priorities: conflict resolution, gender equality, development of Africa, inclusion of persons with disabilities, and youth development. In regard to those areas, a tremendous achievement of the UNOSDP has been the development of the Youth Leadership Programme. Having already held 20 camps in four different continents, bringing more than 600 participants together, in which 25 were persons with disabilities, the programme harnesses the power of sport in a concrete and practical manner. I am also pleased that in the last years we have been able to establish and further strengthen many successful partnerships between the UN and sport organizations, such as the IOC, the International Paralympic Committee and numerous international federations that support our Sport for Development and Peace efforts.

What progress has been made in regards of policies implementation? What would your assessment be?

Policy recommendations on Sport for Development and Peace for governments are being implemented every day, all over the world. In addition to the recognition of the role of sport as an important tool for Development and Peace in the 2030 Agenda and UN General Assembly Resolutions, other main policy developments include the Olympic Truce Resolution and the work of the Group of Friends and the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group.

In September 2015, numerous Member States presented relevant statements concerning sports in the Human Rights Council and in that same session the Council's Advisory Committee presented the report *Promoting human rights through sport and the Olympic ideal*, which includes a set of recommendations concerning National legislation and executive practice, Programme support, Combating discriminatory and other harmful or unfair practices in sport, Media and Education.

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Thematic Working Groups on Sport for Development and Peace have also supported policy developments on sport and specific areas. Most notably in 2015, developments in the Sport and Persons with Disabilities were made by the Republic of Korea, with the “Table Tennis for NepALL” project, a three year Para Table Tennis project in Nepal. Likewise, other Member States have been contributing to policy and programme developments: the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Africa on sport and peace; the United Kingdom in sport and youth and child development, Norway in sport and gender, and China on sport and persons with disabilities as well.

What would UNOSPD contribution to the new agenda on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) be?

UNOSDP is promoting sport's potential in its role as the entry point to the UN system. Our advocacy and facilitation includes the elaboration of information regarding the contribution of sport to the SDGs; mainly, with an overview of this subject in the UNOSDP website and with the UN Secretary-General's Report on Sport for Development and Peace to be presented at the next UN General Assembly in October 2016. Overall, consultations, reporting and other UNOSDP's activities will be conducted with the purpose of further advocating for and facilitating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through sport, and with the ambition of maximizing the contribution that sport can make to each of the Goals.

For instance, sport addresses "Goal 1: End Poverty" by teaching and practicing transferable social, employment and life skills that can lead to improved well-being, economic participation, productivity and resilience. Physical activity and sport are key components of an active lifestyle and mental well-being; they can contribute to the prevention of risks such as non-communicable diseases, as well as serve as a tool for education on sexual, reproductive and other health issues ("Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being"). Through our Youth Leadership Programme, the UNOSDP promotes the SDGs Gender Equality, Quality Education, Reduced Inequalities and Inclusive Societies, among others.

In many countries, sport is considered to be a mainly masculine activity. We have seen that in one of your publications (the Comic book *Score the Goals*) there is a male football team but no sportswoman. Don't you think that these kinds of things contribute to reinforce the masculine image associated with sport?

Many countries face gender inequality, and not only in sport. As I have mentioned previously, one of my priorities is using sport to close the gap and promote gender equality.

The comic book "Score the Goals" that we developed some years ago is primarily aimed at 8-12 year old children and provides a fun interactive way to help them understand, familiarize and reflect about the eight Millennium Development Goals as well as inviting them to take action through several activities provided in the adjoining educational guide. While it's true that the story featured a male football team, the story

contained strong female lead characters, most notably the ship's captain who changed the stereotypical perception of some of the other male characters. This was one of the central messages of the story.

Sport stars – and football players in particular – often act as role models not only for male children but also female children and, as such, can be of great added value to the UN and their partners, when disseminating important messages.

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and fairness ”**

Sport is often associated with competitiveness and, unfortunately, there are many examples of episodes of violence during sport events. How can we fight against this kind of violence?

Sport has a unique power to attract, mobilize and inspire. We shouldn't forget that, by its very nature, sport is about participation. It is about inclusion and teamwork. It stands for human values such as respect for the opponent, acceptance of binding rules, and fairness. Sport is a powerful tool to promote ideals of peace, fraternity, solidarity, nonviolence, tolerance and justice.

For example, UNOSDP puts words into action during the Four Countries 4 Peace football tournament in 2011, an initiative to promote reconciliation and dialogue between young people from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. The team had as many girls as boys, but only the girls are allowed to score goals. In the absence of a referee, the players were also responsible for resolving any potential disagreements. By playing together, these young people were unwittingly learning the universal values of respect, tolerance and fair play.

Which are the challenges that UNOSDP faces for the next few years?

After the Millennium Development Goals the world turned its attention to their successor, the Sustainable Development Goals. For the next fifteen years, we will continue to advance global development, assisting in the work towards, and the realization of, the SDGs. My team and I will make sure that sport will keep playing a vital role in the empowerment of women, youth, individuals and communities as well as the attainment of health, education, development and peace objectives.

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