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Sport and Gender – Facilitating Social Support and Inclusion

Terhi Heinilä, Director, International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG)

Mr Under-Secretary-General, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The United Nations has advanced gender equality substantially as a result of decades of long-term work, among other things through crucial agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Gender equality is not merely a fundamental human right. The realisation of equality also has significant economic and social consequences. The empowerment of women increases a society's productivity and growth and promotes well-being. The UN's Millennium Development Goals, for their part, also advance gender equality and empower women.

We nevertheless have a long way to go in making equality a reality. Women may lack possibilities for education or health care, and thus for well-being. In many societies women suffer from violence and discrimination. Further, women are often under-represented in political and economic decision-making. Women throughout the world continue to experience social inequality on a daily basis. This reality is also apparent with respect to sport, where social phenomena are in turn reflected.

It is thus extremely important that the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (SDP IWG) focuses particular attention on the social role that sport plays in a broad sense. We very much welcome SDP IWG's selection of sport and gender as one of its priority themes. By the same token, we consider it an exciting milestone that the SDP IWG expects to endorse the strategic work plan of the Sport and Gender Thematic Working Group.

In order to promote equality more broadly in a society, and also in sport, it is important to pursue all possible opportunities for collaboration between governments and national and international sports organisations. I'd like to thank the organisers for giving the International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG) the chance, through this second plenary session, to introduce and facilitate a discussion of the issue of facilitating social support and inclusion.

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Firstly, I would like to say a few words about the International Working Group on Women and Sport. The IWG is an independent coordinating body devoted the empowerment of girls and women around the world to participate actively in sport at all levels. IWG consists of



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representatives of key governmental and non-governmental organisations from different regions of the world, and strives to serve as a catalyst for the advancement and empowerment of women in sport globally.

For the 2010-2014 quadrennial term, IWG's chair and secretariat is based in Helsinki, Finland, and is hosted by the Finnish Sports Federation and primarily financed by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. Co-chairs Raija Mattila of Finland and Johanna Adriaanse of Australia jointly lead IWG. IWG's 6th World Conference on Women and Sport will be held in Helsinki in June of 2014. The conference will be oriented towards both policy-makers and practitioners in sport and is open to the academic and research sectors.

The Brighton Declaration

IWG was established in 1994 at the 1st World Conference on Women and Sport, held in Brighton, England. The conference's legacy is the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport, adopted by the 280 attendees, who represented 82 countries. They established IWG to ensure that the conference's legacy would be sustained.

The declaration's overarching aim is to develop a sports culture that enables and values the full involvement of women in every aspect of sport. The declaration encompasses a set of principles grouped under ten headings, as I shall cover in further detail shortly.

The Brighton Declaration is addressed to all governments, public authorities, organisations, businesses, educational and research establishments, women's organizations and individuals responsible for, or who directly or indirectly influence, the conduct, development or promotion of sport or who are in any way involved in the employment, education, management, training, development or care of women in sport. The declaration is intended to complement all local, national and international charters, laws, codes, rules and regulations relating to women or sport.

By committing ourselves to the Brighton Declaration's themes, and by implementing those themes, we can together increase the social importance of sport for girls and women.

The declaration sets forth principles under the following headings:

1. Equity and equality in society and sport
2. Facilities
3. School and junior sport
4. Developing participation
5. High-performance sport
6. Leadership in sport
7. Education, training and development
8. Sports information and research
9. Resources
10. National (domestic) and international cooperation.



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Mr Chairman:

In my presentation today, I would like to review a few of the central themes of the Brighton Declaration from the standpoint of societal influence and participation.

EQUITY AND EQUALITY IN SOCIETY AND SPORT (not to be read aloud)

Under the heading, Equity and Equality in Society and Sport, the declaration states that **“equal opportunity to participate and be involved in sport whether for the purpose of leisure and recreation, health-enhancing physical activity or top-level sport, is the right for every woman.”**

The participation of women in sport and its related activities enhances the personal health and activeness of women and opens doors to the world outside the home - to participation in the society. In addition, the involvement of women in sports and exercise has been found to increase engagement in physical activity by entire families, to improve overall health and well-being, and to exert a wide-ranging impact on a society as a whole.

Sport is a broad social, popular movement based largely on voluntary action. It plays an important social role in bringing people of varied backgrounds together. Sport can be applied as means for social inclusion – as a way to foster through one’s own initiative and hands-on experiences values such as tolerance, responsibility, fair-play and democratic citizenship. Such opportunities likewise offer a crucial means for engaging and incorporating marginalised groups into civil society. With respect toward women and girls specifically, Involvement in sport is an excellent means for them to feel connected to the social fabric of their communities. Likewise, participation in sport and physical activity has positive impacts beyond that of the individual – it also benefits society as a whole. Seeing female members of society partake in these activities helps to shape the norms, values and expectations that society has of women and girls. It opens up increased possibilities for female self-identification and, in turn, for the diversity of female contributions to society, expanding society’s human resource capital.

FACILITIES

The Brighton Declaration stresses that the extent, variety and accessibility of facilities affect the participation of women in sport (1994). It states that **“the planning, design and management of these [facilities] should appropriately and equitably meet the particular needs of women in the community, with special attention given to the need for child care provision and safety.”**

It is noteworthy that participation in sports on the part of women with disabilities continues to lag even further behind. A 2001 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study found that 93 per cent of women with physical disabilities report engaging in no physical activity, compared to 43 per cent of women without disabilities. This lower rate of participation provides one indication that women with disabilities often encounter twofold discrimination. It is important that those with disabilities enjoy open access to sports facilities and that women with disabilities should have access to appropriate facilities and equipment (UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 2007).



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Women also must be able to view sports, exercise, and settings for physical activity as safe. A lack of education or employment, coupled with insecurity in or outside the home, can marginalise and segregate women and lead to a lower social position and increased harassment and violence. (Manjoo, 2011)

When addressing the 5th IWG World Conference on Women and Sport in Sydney in 2010, Australian sex discrimination commissioner Elizabeth Broderick viewed violence against women as a national problem. "Australian women", she said, "continue to experience harassment and violence as an everyday reality. One in three Australian women will experience physical violence in her adult life. Nearly one in five Australian women will experience sexual assault. Yet, reporting and conviction rates for violence against women remain low." She also stressed that gender violence occurs widely at sports facilities and that the fear thereby generated hinders the involvement of women in physical activity.

In the advancement of ethical concerns, international cooperation can have great import at the national level. The Council of Europe was among the first bodies to systematically produce research and other material on sexual harassment in sports. Performing that work was one of the field's leading researchers, Professor Kari Fasting, who is with us today as a lecturer. The Council of Europe's policy delineations contributed to the opening of the discussion and the drafting of publications by my own organisation.

Together with Zambia's Ministry of Sport, Youth and Child Development, the Zambian NGO National Organisation of Women in Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation (NOWSPAR) organised a Southern Africa Women and Sport Consultative Meeting, under the theme "Violence against Women in Sport: Stepping Up to the Challenge," in Lusaka, Zambia, late last month. A resolution stressed that girls and women have the right to a secure sports environment and that it is everyone's human right to be free from sexual harassment and gender-based violence in sport. The resolution called on sports leaders to recognise that young women participating in sports are less likely to enter into violent relationships, incur early pregnancies, or abuse drugs. (Southern Africa Women and Sport, 2011)

When making decisions on the construction and use of sports facilities, we must remember to take into account the security of the facilities, as well as their versatility and accessibility and equity in terms of how access is apportioned between all user groups.

DEVELOPING PARTICIPATION

"Women's participation in sport," the Brighton Declaration states, **"is influenced by the range of activities available. Those responsible for delivering sporting opportunities and programmes should provide and promote activities which meet women's needs and aspirations."**

The promotion of the equality of women is at the same time the promotion of human rights. Men too benefit from a society in which women and men are equal. In families where the women are educated and receive their own income, a greater portion of resources is used for the well-being of the children and the whole family. Generally speaking, a family within the matriarch is considered to be an equal partner is healthier, which in turn accelerates society's



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economic growth.

Engagement in exercise and sports contributes to the enhancement of the health and well-being of girls and women. The objective is the opportunity for women and girls to participate extensively in all forms of exercise and sport.

According to a Eurobarometer published by the European Union in 2010, 43 per cent of men devote time to physical activity once a week, while the same figure among women is only 37 per cent. Among the young, males are clearly more physically active than females. The populations of Nordic countries are relatively active participants in sports and exercise, and Nordic women are very active exercisers and athletes. In Finland, for example, women over 60 more often devote time to health-enhancing physical activity than their male counterparts. Women in Finland are also active in the operations of non-profit, voluntary sports clubs. (European Commission, 2010)

It is worth noting that large cultural differences exist in the involvement of women in physical activity. Culture, religion or ethnic identity can produce challenges for engagement in exercise and sports.

Netball is the most popular team sport among women, whilst football and ice hockey have traditionally been heavily dominated by boys and men. Among women, interest and opportunities to participate in the latter two sports have, however, grown. Internationally, football is one of the fastest-growing sports among women. At least in my home country, the upsurge in the favour accorded by women to ice hockey has accelerated rapidly since women's ice hockey became part of the Olympic programme.

In sports, the rules and structures are often very traditional and settled. It's worth noting that those rules and structures exert a powerful influence on the involvement of women in sports. It is a primary objective of the International Working Group on Women and Sport to work with the international sports movement to expand the athletic activity of women and to better the status of women in sport's various structures. Often, by introducing and supporting the special concerns related to sport for women and the careers of woman athletes, we make substantial progress in various sports.

The Olympic programme has undergone a purposeful balancing. The most recent reform was affected this April, when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) approved the inclusion of women's ski-jumping in the Sochi winter Olympics of 2014. The number of women competing in the Olympics has risen steadily. Women represented 42 per cent of all the athletes participating in the Beijing Olympics of 2008. In the Paralympics, the number of women has likewise increased in recent years but more slowly than in other realms of sport: at Beijing women accounted for 35 per cent of the athletes. The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) views the greatest hindrances to increasing participation by women to be the limited extent – locally, nationally and internationally – of resources and possibilities for physical activity. (International Paralympic Committee, 2010)

The advancement of gender equality will require a great number of sports-policy objectives and practical measures. The international sports movement has drafted many declarations and programmes for the furtherance of equality in sports. In 2008, in the Dead Sea Plan of Action of the 4th IOC World Conference on Women and Sport, the IOC demanded an increase



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in the number of women in sport's international structures, such as international sports federations, and in national Olympic committees. The IOC has also taken active steps so that all the national Olympic committees will name woman athletes to their teams, too.

The IPC's Women in Sport Leadership toolkit, released in 2010, provides a practical resource for those looking to empower women and support women's leadership potential in sports organisations, especially in respect of the Paralympic movement. Another valuable resource is one of the legacies of the 3rd IWG World Conference on Women and Sport, held in Montreal in 2002: the Montreal toolkit contains a wealth of resources for increasing participation and leadership opportunities for girls and women in sport and physical activity. You can learn more about the Montreal toolkit on the IWG website.

LEADERSHIP IN SPORT

The Brighton Declaration finds that **“women are under-represented in the leadership and decision making of all sport and sport-related organisations. Those responsible for these areas should develop policies and programmes and design structures which increase the number of women coaches, advisers, decision makers, officials, administrators and sports personnel at all levels with special attention given to recruitment, development and retention.”**

One key message of the declaration is that, despite both growing participation by women in sport and increased opportunities for women to participate in national and international spheres, increased representation of women in decision-making and leadership roles in sport has not followed.

Mentoring has a very important role to play in the process of bridging women's participation in sport and their leadership potential. The Women's International Leadership Development (WILD) programme, managed by the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation with the support of European Women and Sport (EWS), constitutes one such mentoring initiative. As described by EWS chair Amanda Bennett, WILD increases the confidence and competence of woman leaders so that they can enter sports organisations at the national level, enhancing their skills and confidence further and allowing them in turn to add value to these organisations.

From the organisational management perspective, boosting the number of women makes for a more diverse and better-balanced management team. The European Football Federation announced in March of this year that it was establishing quotas for boosting the number of women in the organisation's leadership positions. “We must find a way to break the glass ceiling,” said federation president Michel Platini. “This is a first but symbolic step towards a better representation in decision-making bodies, but symbols are sometimes key to changing the way we think. I am committed to moving in this direction and overcoming institutional discrimination.” He described women as “one of the biggest social movements.” (Football against Racism in Europe, 2011)

SPORT INFORMATION AND RESEARCH



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According to the Brighton Declaration, **“those responsible for research and providing information on sport should develop policies and programmes to increase knowledge and understanding about women and sport and ensure that research norms and standards are based on research on women and men.”**

We need additional information and statistics on the participation of women in sports, and on the meaning of that participation. A need also exists for further research and monitoring. We need to evaluate continually what has been done and understand what the impacts of these advances are. For example, what policies are subsequently enacted and what are their impacts on women's leadership in the sports movement? We must establish what qualifies as success and continually reconsider whether this definition is in line with our current expectations and aims.

While today's goal may be to see more women in leadership positions in sports bodies at the local, national and international levels, studies have shown that, even when men and women have the same qualifications and similar positions in professional life, women do not enjoy the same status as men on the executive boards of sports organisations. The finish line thus is not an increased or even equal presence in high-ranking positions, but the pursuit of overall gender equality in sports management and the sports movement as a whole.

Sydney Scoreboard is the legacy of the 5th IWG World Conference on Women and Sport, in 2010 and operates as a powerful online tool to track both nationally and internationally women in leadership roles within national sport organizations. The scoreboard provides an internationally accessible, interactive and real time means of tracking progress with regard to women in Chair, Director and Chief Executive Officer positions in national sport organizations. The website of Sydney Scoreboard is www.sydney scoreboard.com.

RESOURCES

Under this heading the Brighton Declaration reads, **“Those responsible for the allocation of resources should ensure that support is available for sportswomen, women's programmes and special measures to advance this Declaration of Principles.”**

It is universal that a greater portion of financing and public support for physical activity is directed at men's rather than women's sports and exercise. Often, public construction of sports facilities is concentrated on sports that men go in for, whilst men, as elite athletes, receive more attention and visibility. (Komi, 2006)

The Anttola Declaration of 2008 demanded increased and sustained investment of human and financial resources to promote equality in sport, and increased financing for success and security. It also underlined the importance of public support for sport in promoting broad and equal opportunities for girls and boys, women and men.

We need more information about the breakdown of funding in sports. We must know the current situation so that resources can in future be allotted equally. Investment of equivalent intellectual and economic resources holds great import for how a society is developed. The even-handed distribution of resources will bring with it not merely equal economic



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opportunities: it will also create egalitarian expectations and dreams.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

“Government and non-government organisations”, the declaration states, “should incorporate the promotion of issues of gender equity and the sharing of examples of good practice in women and sport policies and programmes in their associations with other organisations, within both domestic and international arenas.”

It is crucial that cooperation aimed at the furtherance of gender equality will be carried out broadly at various levels. It's important not to work in a vacuum, but rather to forge partnerships with various stakeholders, such as non-governmental and governmental organizations, the private sector, educational institutions, international agencies, and international networks such as the IWG.

The United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace assumes that governments will seek partnerships to advance its main objectives, such as those pertinent to sport and gender. While putting gender equality and social inclusion up for discussion is exceedingly important, it remains a preliminary step to a much more important step – action. To impart real and lasting change, concrete actions must be taken.

Last but not least, it's so very important to communicate your successes in the field of women and sport. Share this information with stakeholders and people in general, so that they will be well aware of your work and able to learn from your experiences. On behalf of the IWG, I can underscore our commitment to sharing developments in the field of women and sport with our network of over 4500 individuals. Please feel free to consider the IWG's global network and communication tools: the IWG website, our quarterly *Catalyst* newsletter, and social networking tools. (You can find us on Facebook, by the way.) Please use these tools to disseminate information on your initiatives and triumphs, and to learn what is happening in other parts of the world.

Please also consider our 2014 6th World Conference on Women and Sport as a valuable chance to showcase your experiences and to network with others who are interested in promoting gender equality and are involved in the sphere of women and sport.

On behalf of the entire International Working Group on Women and Sport, I thank you kindly for your attention.



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