



SPORT FOR ALL

cohesive, accessible and
tailored to each person

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THE DECLARATION

This declaration on the role of sport in the world today is a call for change, to promote mature social responsibility at every level and for everyone. It has been written in recognition of the tremendous power that sport exerts in the modern world and its potential as an important enabler of the Sustainable Development Goals. While the Holy See recognises the potential that sport has for good in the world, it also acknowledges its failings and seeks to address both in this declaration.

The declaration has been precipitated by the recent global pandemic. COVID-19 has dramatically affected every person on the globe: with sickness, death, mourning, spiritual reflection, psychological distress and financial hardship more visible than ever. For the first time in the modern era, world sport had also stopped. The absence of sporting activity and the pause in many of our daily activities has given time for deeper reflection, including theological reflection, on what it means to be human and what we desire our societies to be as we move into the future. It has also provided us with an opportunity for a deeper reflection on the human and social significance of sport.

1. Vision

The Olympic Charter presents in its ‘Fundamental Principles’: Blending sport with culture and education, 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 principles¹. Other international organizations such as the United Nations have recognized the important role sport can play in our societies. “We recognize the growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives.”² The time is now ready for all those who are engaged in sport to work to ensure that sport makes these rich contributions.

¹ International Olympic Committee. 2021. Olympic Charter. Lausanne: IOC.

² Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs (un.org)

We recognize that

- **Sport must display maturity**

Sport has to *change or be changed*³. It must play its part in a season of renewed responsibility (social, environmental and personal) instead of focusing only on its own interests (remaining closed in on itself). The United Nations has underlined that although it is “already a pioneer and promoter of inclusive and sustainable development in an unstable and unequal world, the sporting world must now redefine and redesign itself, not only to improve its resilience to future shocks, but to broaden its contribution to the world’s efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.”⁴

Sustainable development, inherent to Olympism itself, has to be considered in connection with the full development of the human person: physical, social, psychological and spiritual. ‘Coubertinian’ idealism - embodied in the Olympic Charter - was not founded simply on displays of superior athletic performance, but as a vehicle for promoting social and educational transformation.

- **Sport has the power to change human beings and the world**

The internal goods of sport have to do with the enjoyment of meeting challenges, of going beyond where we were previously, of playing on a team. They are available to every person, regardless of age or skill level. The values experienced while playing on a team, particularly point to the importance of sport being made available to all as part of our commitment to the common good. Our team, in the most fundamental sense, is the human family.

Sport is not an absolute good, however. Its value depends on the context in which it is promoted and the purposes it pursues. If it is accessible and inclusive and remains anchored in sound educational processes, and fosters a commitment to the common good, sport can fully express its potential to improve people and the world.

Human beings are always looking for what is beyond and above themselves and ordinary life, and sport can give voice to this deep

³ Olympic Agenda 2020 - Strategic Roadmap for the Olympic Movement (olympics.com): “As we launch Olympic Agenda 2020+5, the slogan “change or be changed” that inspired Olympic Agenda 2020 remains more compelling than ever.

⁴ Recovering better: Sport for development and peace - Reopening, Recovery and Resilience Post-COVID-19 - Final- SDP-recovering-better.pdf (un.org)

desire for transcendence, beauty and happiness in a peaceful way, uniting people of every race, culture and religion. A strong dimension of sport as an expression of human transcendence emerges in its following aspects: in play which aims at the enjoyment of physical exercise and playing together without ulterior motives; in competition which leads one to give the best of oneself; in its pursuit of happiness which aspires to achieve goals leading to true fulfillment.

2. Mission

Recent times have seen the emergence of new challenges for our societies that can be turned into opportunities, many of them accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Let us have the courage to ensure that sport is part of what matters most, and contributes to a more inclusive society, in which every person is accepted and welcomed, regardless of ability or disability!⁵

Sport can suffer from a never ending desire for more, no matter what the cost and therefore needs to re-establish a healthy balance. To do so, sport has to *belong to everyone, everywhere*, progressing from the grassroots, bringing sport for all and elite sport closer together and not opposing one against the other.

We believe that a fully inclusive sport must be:

- **Cohesive: Safeguarding the unity and solidarity of sport**

Sport in the last century has spread globally, with a vast growth of fans and practitioners, becoming one of the characteristic phenomena of modernity. This rapid development has led sport, particularly elite sport, to suffer sometimes from *an unrestrained orientation towards success* and to be subjected to manipulation, distancing it from its own established values.

There is a danger of a clear separation between the world of elite sport and sport for all, jeopardizing the unitary vision of sport. Instead, it is necessary for sport to recover its balance, in all its spheres and with equal dignity for everybody.

- **Accessible: Guaranteeing sport is made available to everyone**

Sport should be ludic and is an example of a human universal. It can be associated with personal growth and help to foster the common

⁵ Peace and Sport | Be Part of What Matters (peace-sport.org)

good. Everyone should be able to enjoy the benefits of playing a sport by having the opportunity to access it, regardless of sex, abilities or disabilities, cultural, social, economic, ethnic status or religious affiliation. These benefits (including physical, psychological, sociological, economic benefits) should ultimately lead to the overall betterment of the person's wellbeing. It is important that sport agencies and institutions engage in shared actions to overcome all the physical, psycho-social and economic barriers that impede access to sport for people who live in conditions of marginalization and/or exclusion.⁶ Furthermore, affirming that sport belongs to everyone also means that all institutions, no matter their main organizational mission, can use sport to promote psychological development and inclusion.

- **Tailored: Offering a sporting practice tailored to each person's needs**

Everyone must be able to find sports practices suited to their potential, abilities and skills. The sports offered must be adaptable to the needs, limitations and potential of each person, allowing them to enjoy developing their talents in such a way that also fosters their health and well-being. Sports clubs must make a qualitative leap, learning to welcome among their athletes, people in vulnerable situations and people with disabilities, accompanying and guiding them in a sporting experience, as integrated as possible, adapted to their abilities and helping them to develop their talents.

3. Action

It is important that we strengthen our work in an active, inclusive and coordinated manner. In this work, we are not starting from scratch as much has already been done but an acceleration of our efforts is now necessary. For that reason:

We give our ongoing commitment to:

- **Avoid a narrow commercial view of sport**

In some contexts, sport can experience excesses if it becomes purely profit and performance driven, undermining its social and educational value.

⁶ Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs (un.org)

As Pope Francis has said: “Whenever sport is considered only according to economic parameters or to achieve victory at all costs, we run the risk of reducing the athletes to mere merchandise from which to profit. They lose the true meaning of their activities, the joy of playing that attracted them when they were young, and that has led them to make so many sacrifices and become champions.”⁷

A new alliance, creating a solidarity model between sport-for-all and elite sport is essential to strengthening the educational and social dimension of sport and avoiding what weaken this new model.

• **Promote sport tailored to people living in vulnerable conditions**

Having limits is a fundamental dimension of every person. As has been mentioned, sport motivates every person to give their best, to go beyond where they were before. This is never done alone but together in a community. When done in an inclusive, safe and healthy way, this is an enjoyable experience and brings about growth within each person, irrespective of the age or skill level of the player.

Sport should increase its efforts to include people in different situations of vulnerability, such as:

- **People with disabilities:** many institutions offer great examples of tailoring sport to give participants with physical and/or intellectual needs, a pathway to full inclusion in competitive sport and sport for all at community level.

- **People in psychological distress:** “Frequent participation in moderate to vigorous physical activity decreases psychological distress and decreases the likelihood of falling into a high- risk category of mental health disorders,”⁸ as well as psychological difficulties resulting from COVID-19. The stress and anxiety of the pandemic has exacerbated psychological difficulties for many, especially persons in the most vulnerable situations.

⁷ Pope Francis, Address to members of the European Olympic Committee, Saturday 23 November 2013

⁸ Francisco Perales, Jesus Del Pozo-Cruz, Borja Del Pozo-Cruz, Impact of Physical Activity on Psychological Distress: A Prospective Analysis of an Australian National Sample. American Journal of Public Health, 104 (12) 2014

- **Women and girls in situations of vulnerability:** As Pope Francis has said: “the organization of societies worldwide is still far from reflecting clearly that women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men.”⁹ Acknowledgement of historic and contemporary failures to recognize the full dignity of women and girls, in sport, offers a unique opportunity to heal wrongs and better promote the principles of sport for all. The central role of women and girls in sport, is essential to the promotion of social cohesion and integral development.

- **New sociological challenges:** rising polarization across societies is associated with the use of social media that can lead people into ideological bubbles, thereby diminishing concern for the common good. Sport provides opportunities for face-to-face encounters with people from other communities, cultures or religious traditions where players can learn to navigate challenges and even conflict.

A new training for coaches and support staff should be developed to better equip them to deliver safe, inclusive and accessible sport, providing more people and communities the opportunity to practice a sport with joy and to develop their personal skills.

• **Focus on Social Integration through Sport**

Sport offers an opportunity to create a culture of encounter and friendship, which can break down social, cultural, economic, ethnic and religious barriers. It can give meaning to people’s lives as well as generate deep and lasting social and personal relationships. For some, it helps them reintegrate back into society. Apart from coaches and sports organisations, this must be taken into consideration also by teachers, social workers and health professionals.

Therefore, sport must remain accessible to all, with special attention given to people living in marginalized contexts and those on the periphery, including:

- **Refugees and migrants:** Sport can be a positive catalyst for empowering refugee communities, helping to strengthen social cohesion, their psycho-social wellbeing and to forge closer ties with host communities. Recognizing the important role that sports and

⁹ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 23

cultural activities can play in social development, inclusion, cohesion, and well-being, particularly for refugee children partnerships should be pursued to increase access to sporting and cultural facilities and activities in refugee-hosting areas.¹⁰

- **The socioeconomically disadvantaged:** Sport must close or reduce the social gap. Facilities and resources for sport should be available in poorer communities. In some regions, highly specialized coaching for youth is only affordable for wealthy families or excludes girls and women. In such cases, it is easy to lose sight of the communitarian dimension of sport and the common good in society. Resources for sport programs in wealthier school districts are often present but not in schools in poorer communities.

- **The elderly and the youth:** Sport can be used to promote a culture of encounter and peace, especially between the elder and younger generations. Sporting events are characterized by unity and not division; they build bridges not walls.¹¹ As such, sport build bridges across generations, creating new opportunities of intergenerational dialogue.

- **Prisoners:** Sport can provide an instant, supportive social circle both inside, and later outside, prison walls, helping to prevent reoffences and recidivism.

Sporting organizations, social institutions, the private sector, NGOs and public institutions should provide participants and professionals with training to develop their capacity to manage sports environments in an inclusive way. Preserving sport as an experience for inclusion requires creating accessible environments, promoting safe and fair participation and inspiring physical activity by all.¹²

¹⁰ GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES - United Nations, New York, 2018, n.44

¹¹ Address of Pope Francis to members of the European Olympic Committee, Saturday 23 November 2013

¹² IPC, Strategic Plan International Paralympic Committee 2019 to 2022

4. Commitment

Sport is called to be safe and fully inclusive in order to perform at its best. This declaration is not just a statement of principles, but a *declar-action*, an invitation to concrete actions. Sport is a very human endeavor; the intentionality, the will, the vision and values of persons who are engaged in it are of great significance for its future and the future of society.

All those who recognize themselves in this declaration's statements and want to freely subscribe to them, are called to commit themselves, in their own context and through their own means and capacities, to be vehicles for change for the improvement of our society through sport.

ADHERE TO THE DECLARATION



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