United Nations General Assembly  
20 October 2014

Item 11: Sport for development and peace

Statement by Peter Stone  
Adviser  
Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations

(Check against delivery)

Mr President

Australia is committed to the principles of sport for development and peace and to the role the United Nations can play in furthering these principles. We welcome the report of the Secretary-General on this subject introduced this morning and would like to, once again, take the opportunity to thank the Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace, Mr Willfried Lemke for his ongoing efforts to promote the UN’s work in this field.

We would also like to thank Monaco and Tunisia for their co-chairing of the Group of Friends of Sport for Development and Peace, and their facilitation of the biennial resolution, which Australia is pleased to co-sponsor.

Sport’s popularity, its capacity as a communication platform and its ability to connect people, both within and between communities, make it a tool that can be used to meet a range of development challenges, including meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Australia, with a reputation as a sporting nation, is well placed to use sport as a vehicle to contribute to targeted development outcomes. Over the last five years, the Australian Government has committed $49 million to development through sport programs.

Our approach to sport for development first identifies development challenges, and then determines how sport-based activities can help meet these challenges. In the Pacific, working in partnership with governments and NGOs, we have identified non-communicable disease prevention and enhancing the lives of people with disability as priority areas.
Mr President

The Australian Sports Outreach Program works in seven Pacific countries to deliver grass-roots level sports programs in these priority areas. Recently released independent research on the program, commissioned by the Australian Government, provides compelling evidence for the value of sport as a development approach.

In Vanuatu and Nauru, sports programs are contributing to greater inclusion of people with disability in community life by helping to build the confidence and self-esteem of people with disability; providing opportunities for them to interact with their families and communities; and contributing to breaking down barriers and changing negative attitudes.

Community activities are being modified to encourage greater participation by children with disability. Children are motivated to join the program after seeing other children with disability playing sports and being encouraged by parents, friends and volunteers. As a result, these children have increased their self-efficacy and confidence, and expanded their social networks.

Parents and carers of children with disability described an increase in awareness of their child’s capabilities after watching them play sport, and for some parents, this meant they felt more engaged with their child. All parents believed village attitudes had changed for the better once people saw children with disability playing alongside those without.

To combat non-communicable diseases, the ASOP Country Programs in the Pacific promote an increase in physical activity through participation in sport. The evidence presented from research indicates that when used strategically, sports programs can make a measurable contribution to reducing some of the major risk factors of Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) by making people aware of the risks of physical inactivity; providing them with opportunities to be more physically active; and having positive impact on other health-related behaviours, such as improved diets and reduced smoking and drinking.

The research also showed the importance of getting women involved in community-based sports programs. Research has shown that vegetable consumption has increased, and the consumption of tobacco, alcohol and sugary drinks has decreased. This is an important finding given the key role women play in Pacific households.

Mr President

Along with non-communicable disease prevention and enhancing the lives of people with disability, the development through sport programmes also play a role in improving social cohesion, by bringing people in communities together in a positive way, and positively engaging young people and helping them learn important life skills including leadership, teamwork, respecting rules, discipline and perseverance.

Thank you.