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“The possibilities of using sport and the Olympic ideal to promote human rights for all and to strengthen universal respect for them.”

Celebrating Diversity: Inclusivity, Equality, Non-Discrimination in Sports: the Case of Football

According to the Olympic Charter, 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”.¹

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

We would like to bring 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.

Stefano, the initiator and responsible of the project, with other Zambian people, started using sport as a way to gather children and youth. We quote his words: “In the compound there were no football teams, also the football fields were in very bad conditions...football was the easiest way to get in touch with children and youth from the compounds. It was also helpful because in football the colour doesn’t matter. There are two teams and one ball, we were and we are all the same”.

¹ https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/General/EN-Olympic-Charter.pdf#_ga=2.66823406.1923867261.1537774177-1653570702.1530864876

The very first matches were among volunteers and local people; the idea of creating a team arrived later. Cicetekelo became bigger and bigger and it also started winning the amateur league. It happened that its youth won it also 5 years in a row.

Ba Nkole, the Zambian football coach from Cicetekelo says: "Sport has this important responsibility of teaching not just how to play but also how to behave and interact with people".

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.

Contact:

Maria Mercedes Rossi - Main representative of APG23 at UN Geneva-New York

[1, rue de Varembe](#) - Case Postale 96 CH-1211 Geneva 20 - Switzerland

Tel: +41 (0) 22 919 10 42 Fax: +41 (0) 22 919 10 48 Mobile: +41 (0) 79 88 24 980 Mobile: +39 348 24 88 152

Email: mararossi@apg23.org; www.apg23.org

