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Football World Cup in South Africa underlines 'African renaissance' – UN envoy



26 May 2010 – This year's football World Cup, which kicks off in South Africa in two weeks, presents the country and the rest of the continent with an opportunity to harness the power of the international event to project Africa's potential for peace and development, a United Nations envoy said today.

"The World Cup in South Africa is a unique occasion to transform the African people's pride and enthusiasm into a positive dynamic of solidarity, tolerance, and development," said Wilfried Lemke, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace.

The event "underlines African renaissance," Mr. Lemke told a news conference in New York. "Mega-sports events create legacies such as infrastructure and tourism. This World Cup when successful will also contribute to the confidence and pride of many persons and States in Africa," he added. "This is extremely important for the African future."

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will attend the opening ceremony of the first soccer World Cup on the African continent in Johannesburg on 11 June at the personal invitation of South Africa's President Jacob Zuma.

"The fact that the World Cup is being hosted by South Africa is a tribute to the prowess and potential of the entire continent," Mr. Ban's spokesperson, Martin Nesirky, said. "Africa is a top priority for the Secretary-General as we seek to ramp up progress towards achieving the eight Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)) by 2015," he added.

The MDGs are eight international development goals that all UN Member States have agreed to make efforts to achieve by 2015. They include reducing extreme poverty, reducing child mortality rates, fighting disease epidemics such as HIV/AIDS, and developing a global partnership for development.

Several UN funds, programmes, and specialized agencies are using the World Cup for outreach and collaboration with South Africa, and Africa at large, to address and promote issues ranging from economic development and children's rights to peacebuilding.

Last October, the General Assembly adopted a resolution urging the international community to harness the World Cup for the development of the whole African continent.

The UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has been supporting the South African Government in its efforts to prevent and reduce the possible abuse, exploitation and trafficking that some children might be subjected to during the World Cup, said Liza Barrie, UNICEF's Chief of Civil Society Partnerships.

Stéphane Dujarric, Director of Communications for the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), said that as a truly global event, the World Cup is a unique opportunity to raise awareness and advocate for the pursuit of the MDGs, not only in South Africa, but also to audiences around the world.

"In the effort to achieve the MDGs, there are no spectators. Everyone is needed on the pitch to score the goals," he said.

The UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) is working with the South African Government and the local World Cup organizing committee to ensure that the event is held under conditions that will cause minimum ecological consequences for future generations.

"UNEP has long been collaborating with host cities and organizers of mega-sports events. Event greening has steadily gained momentum in the past decade. The 2010 World Cup is no exception," said Munyaradzi Chenje, UNEP's head of policy coordination and inter-agency affairs.

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