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Burundian sports centre a beacon for peacebuilding, says UN official



Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace Wilfried Lemke

5 December 2011 –

A new youth centre in the border region between Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) will use the power of sports to bring peace to an area historically fraught with tragedy, the United Nations sports and peace envoy announced today.

Speaking during his visit to the Youth Sport Centre in Gatumba, Burundi, Wilfried Lemke, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace, expressed his wish for the project to serve as “a beacon of hope and joy” in a region otherwise known for its cross-border violence and economic difficulties.

“This centre is a neutral and safe place, where the local communities can gather, communicate, learn, have fun and construct a new future for themselves, together,” Mr. Lemke said. “On these new sports grounds, a fresh start is possible.”

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In one instance of inter-ethnic brutality in 2004, a refugee transit centre in Gatumba, just inside Burundi, was attacked by a large group of armed individuals, resulting in the massacre of 152 refugees from Tutsi communities in the DRC and wounding 106 others.

As part of a global initiative by the UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP), the Gatumba multi-sports complex will serve as a social and cultural gathering point for more than 7,000 young men and women from both the DRC and Burundi in an attempt to foster better social cohesion.

The centre will also assist local youth in developing income-generating skills by supporting a variety of educational, training and cultural activities, along with the provision of information technology equipment.

“Today, thousands of commendable projects are mobilizing the transformative power of sport to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of people around the world,” Mr. Lemke declared, citing UNOSDP’s various global efforts to bring peace through sports.

In addition to the Gatumba Youth Centre, UNOSDP is also developing four other sports-related projects across the globe, including ones in the Gaza Strip, Tajikistan, Haiti and Ukraine.

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