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Football great Stoitchkov teams up with UN in fight against hunger in Africa



16 March 2011 – Retired Bulgarian football star Hristo Stoitchkov, famed for his explosive acceleration on the field, is boosting United Nations efforts to rebuild the livelihoods of Africans hit by the food crisis, using the analogy of team play in sport to highlight the path to defeating hunger.

“A good team wins. Together we can beat hunger,” the 1994 European Footballer of the Year [said](#) on a two-day visit to UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) projects in Burkina Faso, comparing his time with FC Barcelona’s so-called Dream Team of the 1990s to his present role in the fight against hunger.

Mr. Stoitchkov was part of a delegation of the Association of European Professional Football Leagues (EPFL) to several FAO projects, funded by the European Union (EU), which have helped thousands of families hit by drought and torrential rains return to farming in Africa’s sub-Saharan Sahel region, where the 2010 crisis particularly affected rural populations dependent on agriculture for subsistence.

“It is vital to enable people hit by disaster to feed themselves again,” he said.

FAO Assistant-Director General for Communication and External Relations Annika Söder said communicating what is being done to help people in need is vital to ensure continued support. “Football enables us to inform a wide European audience on the humanitarian programmes involved.”

EPFL Chairman David Richards, who is also Chairman of the English Premier League, said European football is taking on the responsibility that goes with its ever more prominent role in society. “We want to contribute to alleviating the plight of nearly one billion people who go to bed hungry every day,” he added.

Representing the 30 largest European professional football leagues and almost 950 clubs, EPFL teamed up with FAO in 2008 to launch a ‘Professional Football Against Hunger’ campaign. Recently, they welcomed the world's largest humanitarian donor, the European Union – Humanitarian Aid, as a new partner to raise awareness about the unacceptable level of hunger.

FAO is currently operating 27 emergency projects in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle-East and Latin-America with EU-funding, for a total budget of €37 million. In Burkina Faso, the agency FAO received some €1.8 million from the EU to provide livestock and animal feed, as well as support to urban gardening and training, reaching some 80,000 people.

Meanwhile, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso's capital, Mr. Stoitchkov played a game of football with schoolchildren. “Football gives hope,” he said. “As a kid, I also lived with hunger. As long as you play, you don't think about it.”

The Burkina Faso project is just one of multiple partnerships between UN agencies and the world of sport aimed at raising awareness and funds for humanitarian causes.

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