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## **UN official hails 2012 Paralympic Games as celebration of inclusion**



Sierra Leonean amputees take part in football exhibition game. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

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With the 2012 London Paralympic Games only hours away from their torch-lighting ceremony, a senior United Nations official has lauded the sporting event for its celebration of inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities.

“Paralympic athletes achieve remarkable performances and get the chance, every two years, to shine in the limelight and show the world what they are capable of,” the Secretary-General’s

Special Adviser on [Sport for Development and Peace](#), Wilfried Lemke, said yesterday at a ceremony inaugurating the Paralympic Wall in the Olympic Village in London.

“Sport is a wonderful equalizer and a very efficient tool to ensure inclusion. It can certainly place everyone on a level playing field,” Mr. Lemke added.

The 2012 Paralympic Games are the fourteenth edition of the sporting event and also the largest Paralympic Games ever to be held, with more than 4,200 athletes from 166 countries competing in 21 sports.

In a news release, the UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace, which Mr. Lemke heads, noted that the newly unveiled Paralympic Wall would promote the ratification and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in an effort to ensure that sport is ultimately recognized as a global tool for inclusion, tolerance and diversity.

“Paralympic athletes are real change makers and role models in the sense that they greatly contribute to changing stereotypes and the way we sometimes look at persons with disabilities as well as the way they look at themselves,” he continued, noting that “access to sport, physical activity and play is a fundamental right for everyone.”

The Convention, which entered into force in May 2008 and has so far been endorsed by 144 countries, is the culmination of years of global efforts to ensure that the rights of the world’s estimated 650 million persons with disabilities are guaranteed and protected.

It asserts the rights to education, health, work, adequate living conditions, freedom of movement, freedom from exploitation and equal recognition before the law for persons with disabilities.

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