



Football greats seek to score Millennium Development Goals in UN charity game



Zidane and Ronaldo

10 December 2009 – An international roster of football stars meet SL Benfica of Portugal in Lisbon next month in a United Nations 'Match Against Poverty,' with soccer greats Ronaldo of Brazil and Zinédine Zidane of France playing on the same side for the first time in a symbolic demonstration of the urgency of working together to fight the global scourge.

The shots that the two stars, both UN Development Programme (**UNDP**) Goodwill Ambassadors, take this time aim not so much at landing the ball in the net as on scoring a different kind of goal, the eight UN Millennium Goals (**MDGs**) that seek to slash a host of social ills, ranging from extreme poverty and hunger to maternal and infant mortality to lack of access to education and health care, all by 2015.

"No one is a spectator in the struggle to end poverty," Ronaldo, who now plays for Corinthians in Brazil, said of the 25 January match, the 7th in an annual series, half the proceeds of which will benefit UNDP anti-poverty programmes. "It is only through working together, on the same team, that we will achieve the Millennium Development Goals."

Zidane, who retired from active football in 2006 but continues to play in the annual Match Against Poverty, echoed Ronaldo. "We must score the eight goals through commitment, willpower and teamwork," he said.

UNDP Administrator Helen Clark said this year's match takes on special importance as it comes five years before the MDG deadline. "The MDGs are enormously important targets, the achievement of which would mean a huge improvement to peoples' lives," she said.

“Achieving them will require strong partnerships, enough dedicated resources, unwavering political leadership, and a long-term strategy to ensure that how we develop and grow is sustainable in every sense.”

SL Benfica chairman expressed his club’s pleasure at being associated with UNDP. “Football is a great way to get people together for a good cause,” he said.

The other half the proceeds will go to the SL Benfica Foundation, targeted at social development projects in Portuguese-speaking African countries.

Proceeds from the previous six matches have benefited anti-poverty initiatives ranging from support to female entrepreneurs to the construction of sports centres for street children and the disadvantaged throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The game is the latest in a long list of cooperation between the UN and international sports that has seen the UN Children’s Fund (**UNICEF**) team up with the European Swimming League in “a race against time” to prevent deaths from unclean water; the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) partner the WTA Tour of women’s tennis to promote gender equality; and the UN World Food Programme (**WFP**) launch “Cricket Against Hunger” with England and Wales to draw attention to the plight of 400 million chronically hungry children around the world.

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