

UN official stresses vital role of sports in achieving key development goals



UN Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace Wilfried Lemke

28 September 2010 – Sports federations could play an important part towards achieving the social and economic targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**), the United Nations Special Adviser on Sport for Development says.

In a speech yesterday to the opening of the World Convention of the International Swimming Federation (**FINA**) in Montevideo, Uruguay, Wilfried Lemke called on international sports federations to join the UN in its ongoing efforts to use sports as a tool for social development.

“No one dies from not learning how to play football or tennis, but people do die in great numbers from not learning how to swim,” Mr. Lemke said. “By working hand in hand with the United Nations, the world of sport can save and improve the lives of millions of people around the world.”

Before his visit to Uruguay, Mr. Lemke paid a four-day visit to Rio de Janeiro, which hosted this year’s Homeless World Cup soccer tournament, on Copacabana beach. The initiative, which gives homeless persons from around the world the opportunity to gain new confidence in life, has inspired many of its former participants to improve their lives.

“To experience the spirit of the participants, who do often not possess more than the very basic necessities in life, and to see them perform in a very motivated, ambitious and fair way was an experience which cannot be equalled by the general football match everyone can visit,” he said.

“Here, it is not the simple question of winning a tournament, but it is a question of finding a new path in life, which all players have fought for with great dignity.”

The Special Adviser also met with senior officials to discuss two major sporting events that Rio de Janeiro will be hosting: the 2014 FIFA World Cup – and the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games. He stressed that UN know-how in the field of social development made it particularly well-placed to cooperate with all stakeholders involved in the preparations of those events.

Earlier this year, the Secretary-General’s Special Adviser announced the launch of a five-year partnership between the UN and SportAccord – an umbrella organization that brings together 104 international sports federations and organizations.

While in Rio de Janeiro, Mr. Lemke also visited three grassroots community projects assembled under the roof of the Brazilian branch of the Sport for Social Change Network.

One of these, the Graef Project, is a social and educational programme dedicated to underprivileged youth which offers sailing activities. The non-governmental organization (NGO) Fight for Peace was established in

2000 by the former British boxer Luke Dowdney in a complex of favelas. And the NGO Instituto Reacao offers judo practice and complementary activities in low-income areas of the city.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

Ban calls on sports to help score the eight Millennium Development Goals