



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

**Keynote Remarks for Mr. Vladimir Voronkov
Under-Secretary-General, UNOCT**

High-Level Event - Online Symposium

**Football for Peace
“Unlocking the Power of Football”
The Role of Football in Preventing & Countering Violence**

10 November 2020 – 10:00AM EST

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Dear friends,

I am delighted to co-host this high-level event along with Football for Peace and the Governments of the State of Qatar and the United States.

At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic risks exacerbating divisions within society, it is vital that we harness the tremendous power of sport as a force for good.

The United Nations fully recognizes the importance of sport in helping to prevent and reduce violence, in advancing health, education and social inclusion.

Football in particular has the power to unite people—to unite us, in a way that little else does.

I experienced it first-hand only a couple of years ago when the FIFA World Cup took place in my home country, the Russian Federation. I had the privilege to watch a game with the Secretary-General in Moscow, and was amazed by the

joy and friendly energy of so many thousands of people from around the world gathered in the stadium.

Sport transcends national, cultural and socioeconomic barriers. It is a language that we all can understand.

From Bamako to Boston, Buenos Aires to Baghdad, football breaks down social barriers, heals divisions and champions tolerance.

It is a powerful agent of peace that brings hope where there is only despair.

Football and other sports play a key role in preventing violent extremism by empowering young women and men and giving them a sense of belonging; by promoting respect and building stronger communities; and by keeping them rooted and resilient against terrorist narratives and recruitment.

Football can also be a bridge across generations.

That is why my Office launched a major global programme earlier this year to promote sport and its values as a tool to prevent violent extremism, and to strengthen the security of major sporting events.

I would like to thank Her Excellency Ambassador Alya Al-Thani and the State of Qatar for their generous financial support to this multi-year programme, and to the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea who are also financially supporting this programme. The United States engagement in our activities is very much appreciated.

We are working closely with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, and the International Centre for Sport Security to implement the programme.

In September, we convened a High-Level Meeting and an Expert Group Meeting to launch a specific stream of work on the Prevention of Violent Extremism through Sports.

Around 500 representatives from UN entities, regional organizations, Member States, sport bodies and civil society shared good practices of sport-based interventions to tackle violent extremism.

We heard from Ms. Suad Galow, the Chairperson of the Somali Basketball Association, how sport taught her valuable life skills such as teamwork, discipline and leadership.

And from Ms. Sari Essayah, member of the Finnish International Olympic Committee and World Race Walking Champion, who spoke about the direct link between sport, education and self-confidence.

We will use the event's findings to produce a handbook for policy-makers, civil society and sports bodies on how to implement sport-based initiatives to prevent and counter violent extremism.

Last week we launched a call for proposals - through our partner UNICRI - to support grassroots civil society organizations that are using sports-based projects to tackle violent extremism and strengthen community resilience.

And next year, we will launch a global campaign on sports values to prevent violent extremism featuring famous athletes. This campaign will gain momentum during the Africa Cup of Nations, the Tokyo Olympics and the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

I am especially grateful to everyone at Football for Peace for helping us develop this innovative campaign.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, we have a busy year ahead of us, but I know there is more that we can do.

I look forward to hearing from the Young Peace Leaders and other expert speakers this morning on how we can collectively unlock the power of football to prevent violence and help build a better and more sustainable future for all.

I thank you.