



The Power of Sport to Prevent Violent Extremism

Online Roundtable Discussion to Commemorate the International Day for the Prevention of Violent Extremism as and when Conducive to Terrorism

PRESS RELEASE

UNITED NATIONS EVENT SPOTLIGHTS ROLE OF SPORTS IN PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (PVE) ON FIRST EVER INTERNATIONAL DAY

New York, 13 February 2023 – The United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and its partners gathered professional athletes, Civil Society Organizations, youth leaders and representatives from international organizations, sport federations and member states for a [virtual roundtable](#) on the power of sport to prevent violent extremism (PVE). The event was organized on the occasion of the first commemoration of the [International Day](#) for the Prevention of Violent Extremism as and when Conducive to Terrorism.

Building on the UNOCT-led Global Sports Programme's #MoreThanAGame campaign, the roundtable provided a platform for in-depth discussion on sport-based PVE policy-making and activities, grassroots Sports-for-Development (S4D) tools as well as the role of athletes and sporting events in fostering peaceful, inclusive and prosperous societies.

Opening the event, Mauro Miedico, UNCCT Deputy Director and Chief of the Special Projects and Innovation Branch, stressed that sports events are often targeted by terrorist groups because of the values that they represent. *“But sport can also play a unique and compelling role in building resilient societies and preventing attraction to violent ideologies, as sport has the power to convey essential values of tolerance, respect, inclusion, and solidarity that can work against the drivers of radicalization which lead to violent extremism,”* he added.

Following the opening segment, **Samantha Johnson, Sports Anchor at Al Jazeera** engaged participants in a conversation on how sports can positively influence lives across borders, generations, and communities and foster resilience to violent extremism and hate narratives.

Sharing her personal story, **Khalida Popal, former captain of Afghanistan's Women's Football Team and Founder and Director of Girl Power Organization** stressed that *“Growing up in a male dominated country and a war zone, football proved that it can bring unity and create a safe space for women to talk about the issues they were facing in Afghanistan. (...) Now being a refugee outside of my country and facing challenges between minorities and local communities, I am again trying to use sport as a tool to bring people together.”*

Highlighting the importance of athletes being role models in their communities, **Isabella Echeverri, Professional Colombian Football Player and Save the Dream Ambassador** said *“Athletes are role models on and off the pitch. In sports, it is important to respect your opponents, to be loyal to your team, to show integrity by managing a tough loss, and courage and humility when you win a game. When we leave the pitch, we can use our platforms to inspire and help young people, e.g. to show respect, love their bodies, be kind to other people, be aware of mental health issues, eat better, and exercise.”*

“Sports introduced me to people with different nationalities, cultures and religions. That introduction changed my life. On the pitch we play as a team and have the same goals. These sports values can be easily transferred from the pitch to the community” said Masereka Wilber, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo who participated in a sports programme by the Integrated Community Development Initiative (ICDI) and previously shared his story as part of the #MoreThanAGame Campaign.

[#MoreThanAGame](#) was launched alongside the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar by UNOCT-led Global Sports Programme in partnership with Generation Amazing Foundation, Qatar’s human and social legacy programme of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy. The campaign is headlined by professional footballer and UNESCO Ambassador Dr. Nadia Nadim and promotes the potential of sport as a force for good.

Sports has long played a significant role in spreading positive values throughout the world and across civilizations and cultures, particularly among youth. The *UN Global Programme on the Security Major Sporting Events, and Promotion of Sport and Its Values as a Tool to Prevent Violent Extremism* (“Global Sports Programme”) provides technical assistance to member states on how to incorporate sport values-based PVE initiatives in national strategies for preventing violent extremism. It also supports grassroots Civil Society Organizations in implementing community-level sport-for-PVE projects and engages with youth to ensure that their unique perspectives on PVE through sport are considered by policymakers.

UNOCT implements the Global Sports Programme in partnership with the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), the International Centre for Sport Security (ICSS). The Programme is funded by the State of Qatar, the Republic of Korea and the People’s Republic of China through the United Nations Peace and Development Fund (UNPDF).

Commemorating the [International Day for the Prevention of Violent Extremism as and when Conducive to Terrorism](#), UNOCT through its Behavioural Insights Hub in Doha and Global Sports Programme launched an exclusive sports podcast series [“Power of the Pitch”](#). The podcast examines how Behavioural Insights are being applied to sports and when addressing violent extremism factors that may be conducive to terrorism.

To watch the recording of the Roundtable, please visit:

<https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1x/k1x2qr05tv>

ADDITIONAL QUOTES

Massimiliano Montanari, CEO of the International Centre for Sport Security (ICSS): *“While paying a tribute to the International Day for the Prevention of Violent Extremism as and when Conducive to Terrorism, we are joining this event to remind ourselves that every single day matters in the fight against violent extremism. We are building the house of dialogue brick on brick, by paving the path of social inclusion and empowering youth leaders through the values of sport.”*

Mr. Leif Villadsen, Deputy Director, United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI): *“UNICRI is pleased to be a part of celebrating and promoting the positive impact that sport can have on communities and individuals, as well as the important role it can play as a tool for the prevention of violent extremism. In highlighting the vital experience and hard work of civil society organizations implementing sport-based PVE projects, this Roundtable has been an important platform for collaboration and learning among stakeholders.*

Bram Van Haver, speaking on behalf of Miguel Angel Moratinos, High Representative, United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC): *“Sport is a key tool to prevent violent extremism as it transcends geographical borders. The universal popularity of sport presents an opportunity to attract and mobilize people of all ages, cultures, and religions, making it a unique peacebuilding tool.”*

Jassim Al Ali, Events Director, Generation Amazing Foundation (GA): *“Youth organizations can play a very critical role in resilience against violent extremism. Through the power of sport, we can drive young people to impact change in their communities through these organizations.”*

For more information:

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