



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

**A High-level Event Promoting the Power of Sport to Prevent and Counter
Violent Extremism**

25 September 2019 13:00-15:00

Statement of the Under-Secretary-General

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

I am delighted to co-host this event on “Promoting the Power of Sport to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism” with the United States and the State of Qatar and I would like to thank the Football for Peace Foundation for the initiative that they will introduce shortly.

Sports, especially football, unites us all. We see this from children playing in a neighbourhood park to the most loyal football fans supporting their country or local club team.

When the World Cup is held every four years, you can hear cities grow quiet, and see people from different nationalities, political affiliations and cultural backgrounds celebrating -or crying- together.

Sports can teach so many values critical to achieving peaceful and secure societies.

Sports teach discipline, team work, integrity, compassion and the need to support each other to achieve a common goal.

They promote tolerance and respect for others who may come from different backgrounds but who share the same love for competition, but also for the fairness, inclusion, perseverance and equality that it entails.

Sports offer a sense of belonging and of hope. Football in particular has the power to reach the most remote communities. It can be played on a patch of grass or under the lights of the largest stadiums with thousands of people.

And let us remember the joy brought by the recent Women's World Cup when all of the competing teams inspired all of us, men, women, girls and boys alike.

And congratulations again to you, Carli, and to the whole US team for your enormous achievements.

When we speak of violent extremism, we often hear of the motivations of vulnerable youth who join violent extremist groups out of a sense of grievance, who feel excluded, who feel isolated and powerless, without hope for a good future and who see no opportunity to express their frustrations. They may yearn to belong to something bigger than themselves.

Violent extremists preach intolerance and hatred and prey on the confusion and quest for answers in an overwhelming world.

This is exactly the contrary to what sports teach. Violent extremists take advantage in countries trying to resolve and manage conflicts among communities over limited and shared resources. They provide simple black and white responses and 'us versus them' narratives, when it is understanding, patience and respect for different perspectives what we need to address profound challenges.

Violent extremists often ban sports and attack sporting events because they understand the profound power that sports have to bring people together and lift them up.

The United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy recognizes that to effectively counter terrorism and prevent and counter violent extremism the world must stand up together.

Member states have the primary responsibility to counter terrorism. But as terrorism and violent extremism do not have borders, addressing them require concerted efforts and partnerships involving governments, communities, civil society, the private sector, academia, individual citizens as well as international and regional organisations.

My Office will soon launch a global programme on the Security of Major Sports Events and the Promotion of Sport and its Values as a Tool to Prevent Violent Extremism.

This three-year programme will focus on the security of sports venues which, as gatherings of ordinary citizens are often the target of violent extremists.

Fortunately, many recent major sporting events have successfully taken place due to the preparatory measures implemented by governments and law enforcement agencies.

Our new programme seeks to draw on and disseminate these global best practices. It will also support the development of strategies to utilize sports as a means to prevent and counter violent extremism.

The programme will be delivered in cooperation with the United Nations Alliance of Civilization, the UN Interregional Criminal Justice Research Institute and the International Centre for Sport and Security.

It is an innovative programme, which will bring together the counter-terrorism and security communities with prevention of violent extremism specialists, local communities, and private sector

entities, who will work hand-in-hand in the common endeavor of securing major sporting events, and in preventing violent extremism.

We are also planning to design a major campaign called “Say NO to Terrorism’. It will use the voice of world-famous athletes who can be far better advocates for tolerance, inclusiveness and the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism, than any governmental or UN officials can be.

Let me conclude by inviting you to work with the United Nations in a global effort to advance the aspirations we have here today and harness the power of sports to fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

Thank you.