



PRESS RELEASE

UN TO LAUNCH *INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION* ON 5 NOVEMBER

Press Conference to Feature UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, UN Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace Adolf Ogi, Tennis World No 1 Roger Federer, and NY City Marathon's Defending Women's Champion Margaret Okayo

United Nations, New York, 2 November 2004 – Swiss tennis great Roger Federer and Kenyan ING New York City Marathon record-holder Margaret Okayo are joining forces with the United Nations to unveil plans for a year-long push highlighting the power of sport to bridge cultural and ethnic divides and improve the quality of people's lives.

The International Year of Sport and Physical Education 2005 seeks to encourage the use of sports to promote education, health, development and peace. It will be the topic of a United Nations press conference here featuring UN Secretary General Kofi Annan; his Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace, Adolf Ogi; H.E. Ali Hachani, Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations; Federer; Okayo; and Shashi Tharoor, UN Under Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, who will moderate.

“Sport can play a role in improving the lives of whole communities“, said the Secretary-General. “I am convinced that the time is right to build on that understanding, to encourage governments, development agencies and communities to think how sport can be included more systematically in the plans to help children, particularly those living in the midst of poverty, disease and conflict.“

During the press conference, governments, athletes and sports federations, industries, clubs and non-governmental organizations will be urged to use 2005 to step up or join efforts to achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals agreed to by world leaders, including cutting poverty and hunger in half, ensuring that all children attend primary school and stemming the spread of HIV/AIDS, all by 2015.

The United Nations has long acknowledged the importance of sports in society and has established strong ties to the sports world. Its agencies, funds and programmes have undertaken a wide variety of sports-related activities both to call attention to pressing challenges, such as environmental degradation, and to impact the lives of poor or marginalized people. Initiatives range from projects to ensure that children in refugee camps can play soccer to programmes to promote education by linking sports participation to school attendance and academic performance to activities designed to create jobs at newly developed recreational zones in sports facilities where the unemployed can receive vocational training.

The United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP) serves as a key link between the UN system and the sports world, fostering and promoting the use of sports in development and peace-building programmes.

A report published by 10 United Nations agencies last year at the request of the Secretary-General inventoried the numerous United Nations programmes that have successfully used sport and found that they have tapped only a fraction of the possibilities to incorporate sport, recreation and physical activities into development programmes.

“ Our goal as we launch the International Year of Sport and Physical Education with two world class champions is to capture the imagination of the public and to say to everyone who will listen that -- from the tiniest village to the largest city -- sport can make a difference in people’s lives and can help make the world a better, safer place to live,“ said Ogi, who, along with UNICEF’s Executive Director, Carol Bellamy, co-chaired the Task Force which wrote the report.

In November 2003, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2005 as the International Year of Sport and Physical Education. Last month, the General Assembly adopted a resolution stressing the potential of sport and the need to build a global partnership to use sports as a tool for development and peace in 2005. Both resolutions were sponsored by Tunisia.

For press queries, please contact:

In New York:

Cassandra Waldon, Tel.: (212) 457-1254, E-mail: cassandra.waldon@undp.org; or

Francoise Gerber Tel: (212) 457-1075, E-mail: francoise.gerber@undp.org.

In Geneva:

Michael Kleiner, Tel: (41-22) 917-2555, E-mail: mkleiner@unog.ch

For accreditation: Journalists without United Nations accreditation who wish to attend the press conference should send a request on company letterhead signed by a supervisor to Mr. Abdellatif Kabbaj, Chief, UN Media Accreditation Unit, United Nations at fax (212) 963-4642. For additional information, please call (212) 963-7463.

For more information on the United Nations work in the area of sports for development and peace, please visit: <http://www.un.org/themes/sport/index.htm>