

**Introductory remarks by Carolyn Hannan, Director
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Conversation on women, gender equality and sport

To launch the UN Division for the Advancement of Women publication

“Women 2000 and Beyond”

countries adolescent girls have fewer opportunities than boys for social interaction outside the home and beyond family networks.

Because sport was traditionally perceived as a male domain, women's and girls' participation in sport also challenges gender stereotypes, and has thus potential for reducing discrimination and breaking down entrenched attitudes. Girls' participation can also have a significant impact on the attitudes of boys and young men towards gender equality. Seeing girls succeed in soccer, which in many parts of the world is considered a male domain, can lead to boys reconsidering their perceptions of the roles and capabilities of girls.

Sporting events and arenas have been effectively used to get important information for women and girls on their reproductive rights and health and on HIV/AIDS. Sport has also been an effective channel for information to men and boys on gender equality, including on equitable sexual relations and on violence against women.

The publication illustrates that women's increased involvement can also promote positive development in sport - through providing alternative values and attitudes, knowledge, experiences and capabilities. Women's increased participation in decision-making in sport diversifies the talent pool among coaches and managers, administrators, and other officials. Increased numbers of women in key positions can provide positive role models and mentors for girls in sport.

The publication looks at the areas where equality cas

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The involvement of women and girls in sport varies in different socio-economic and socio-cultural contexts. Some groups of women and girls have additional constraints as a result of race, religion, language, and disability. In developing sport policies and programmes, it is important to recognize the diversity and difference among women.

Despite progress made, there are still significant gaps and challenges in relation to the access and participation of women and girls in sport which must be clearly identified and addressed. Women continue, for example, to face discrimination in official regulations in some international competitions and sporting facilities.

While both men and women can suffer from a lack of safe and appropriate sport facilities, resources and training opportunities, these constraints are often exacerbated for women and girls. For example, the unequal sharing of household and family responsibilities limits their free time. The risk of sexual harassment and abuse makes appropriate timing and location of activities critical. In addition, the lack of female role models and mentors is a significant constraint.

The attitudes of men to women's involvement in sport – as athletes, coaches, managers and officials, broadcasters and sponsors, as well as in the general public - can be a major constraint. Women and girls themselves may not have developed adequate understanding of the intrinsic value of sport and its contribution to personal development and well-being, or of their

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also not provided equitably to women and men. This applies to both contexts involving professional athletes and local contexts involving amateur athletes.

There is still very far to go before women's sports are given equitable treatment in

including through the Commission on Women and Sports. In this context, it is exciting to be able to turn our attention to the next Olympics will be held in Beijing in August this year.

We are therefore delighted that Counsellor Zhang Dan from the Permanent Mission of China to the United Nations will provide us with information on women's participation the forthcoming Olympics.

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The organization of the conversation

Let me say a few words on the organization of this conversation on women, gender equality and sport. We will begin with the short video message. The each of the participants in the conversation will be given three minutes to briefly introduce themselves and raise two or three critical issues on women, gender equality and sport. Once each of the participants has made their initial intervention, I will open up for dialogue among them. Each participant can raise their name plate to indicate their request to take the floor to interact with other participants, responding to what has been said, raising questions or making further points.

Further into the conversation, I will open up the discussion to all participants and would then welcome further inputs, questions to participants and comments on points they have raised.

I will not make long introductions to those participating in the conversation as this would take too long. Instead we have prepared a compilation of short bios which will be handed out to you.

I expect that we will conclude sometime after 12.30, to allow you to have time for more informal interaction before we have to leave the room free for the next event at lunchtime. I am sure you will welcome the opportunity to discuss further with this interesting group of stakeholders.

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