

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

**OPENING REMARKS AT CONFERENCE  
“SPORT AT THE SERVICE OF HUMANITY”**

**Vatican, 5 October 2016**

Your Holiness Pope Francis,  
Dr. Thomas Bach, President of the International Olympic Committee,  
Eminences,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to be here with you. I thank The Holy See and the International Olympic Committee for their vision in uniting people of all faiths and cultures through sport.

Your Holiness is a committed advocate on behalf of our planet, particularly through your Encyclical on Care for Our Common Home. You have spoken up time and again for the most vulnerable. I deeply appreciate your moral leadership and humanitarian vision.

Sport and faith are based on fundamental values of respect and friendship. At their best, they are open to everyone; they are diverse and inclusive; they transcend barriers of nationality and ethnicity.

They are intertwined in people’s lives around the world, strengthening social bonds, creating memorable occasions and inspiring people to do better for themselves, and for each other.

They can both be powerful forces for good in our world.

Last year, global leaders came together to agree on a plan for people, peace, prosperity and the planet. The plan – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – is made up of 17 goals, from eradicating poverty to ending hunger and promoting peaceful, inclusive societies.

Sport and faith can help us achieve these goals by driving social change and fostering tolerance, understanding and peace.

I will never forget a football match in Sierra Leone I had the privilege to attend in 2013. Both teams were made up of people who had lost a limb in that country's brutal civil war. What would otherwise have been a simple sporting event was instead a moving display of unity, determination and dignity.

Every sports fan knows: sport can bring us to tears. It can give us great joy. It makes us one with our fellow men and women.

That is why we value so highly the humanitarian projects of the International Olympic Committee and International Paralympic Committee, and the contributions of the athletes and sports personalities who are working as UN Goodwill Ambassadors.

More recently, I was honoured to meet the refugee athletes who competed at the Summer Olympics in Rio. They were a powerful reminder of sport's ability to promote dignity and human rights.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

We are here today on this wonderful occasion to celebrate these two very special human activities that enhance our lives and give them meaning.

But this is just the beginning.

As the world becomes ever more interconnected, national borders are losing their importance. People are bound by ties that transcend nationality, language and ethnicity.

The bonds and communities that are built around faith and sport will be even more important in future.

With principled leadership and vision, together, we can achieve great things.

Let us summon the best from faith and sport to celebrate our common humanity.

I thank Your Holiness and The Holy See again for your strong commitment to sport as a force for peace and social good.

Thank you very much.