

# SPORT PEACEBUILDING: EMERGENCE, SUSTAINABILITY AND DISABILITY

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## Introduction

- Sport as a tool for peacebuilding has the ability to effect change at the global level by providing life skills to youth and children such as communication, leadership, cooperation, discipline, participation, respect and trust<sup>1</sup>.
- According to the UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) sport is “a flexible and cost-effective medium for post-conflict relief work and peace building as well as conflict prevention”<sup>2</sup>.
- Current sport and peace initiatives focus on developing sustainability of positive programs and outcomes for nondisabled people in both high and low income countries.
- The UNOSPD “works closely with UN system sister organizations, the London Games Organizing Committee, the UK Government and the International Olympic and Paralympic Committees to channel the publicity and excitement of the Games for the promotion of development and peace building initiatives”<sup>3</sup>.
- “During the Paralympic Games, more activities were planned, in particular highlighting and fostering issues pertaining to the well-being, empowerment and inclusion of persons living with a disability.”<sup>4</sup>
- The Centre for Peace and Reconciliation Studies at Coventry University and the International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation, just before the Paralympics, organized an international inter-disciplinary conference for academics and practitioners focusing on disability sport as a social change. The conference had among others the theme of “Disability Sport as a tool for peace and development in post-conflict zones”<sup>5</sup>.

## Purpose/Objective

- Visibility of disabled people as actors in furthering development and peace through sport needs improvement.
- The second Peace and Sport Forum in 2008 was held with the theme “How can sport encourage communities to come together by helping them to accept their differences?”<sup>6</sup>

## Method/Results

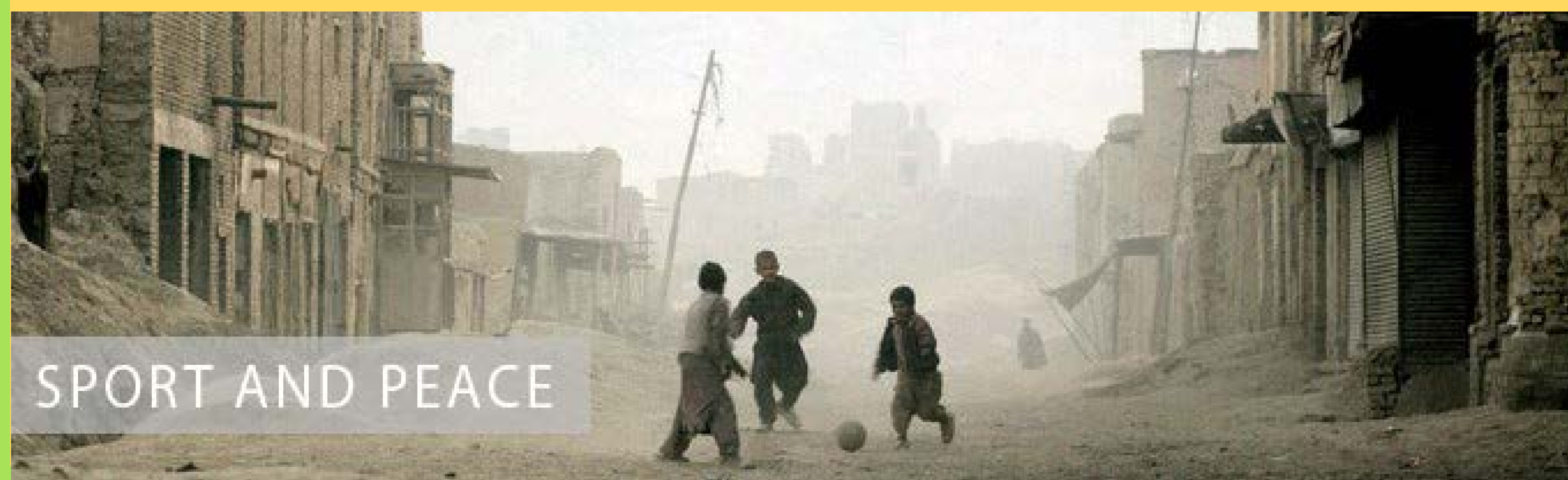
- Literatures generated around sport peacebuilding programs and initiatives were searched for peacebuilding initiatives toward disabled people.
- Little sport peacebuilding programs or initiatives existed that include disabled people in high income countries and little existed for disabled people in low income countries. For those found, there was no indication of level of sustainability of programs.

## Discussion

- “Sport has a unique and irreplaceable capacity to unite people, going far beyond ethnic, religious or social differences. I am convinced that sport can be at the long-term service of peace”<sup>7</sup>—HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco. It would be nice if ability differences were added to such a quote.
- To fulfill the vision of disabled people joining the group of leaders in peace and development through sport, two obstacles have to be overcome.
  - 1. Barriers to participation in sport experienced by disabled people, particularly those in low income areas.
  - 2. Acceptance of ability difference.
- Without acceptance of difference, especially of ability difference, no harmonious development of humankind can take place.
- If disabled people are hardly included in sport peacebuilding initiatives in high income countries then it is not surprising that they are hardly included in sport peacebuilding programs in low income countries. This presents a problem from a global health perspective because exclusion of disabled people in peacebuilding and mainstream sporting events such as the emerging Youth Olympics creates barriers to diplomacy and openness toward increased dialogue and greater cultural understanding of ability difference.
- The goal of “Olympism” is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity<sup>8</sup>.
- It is high time Olympism is applied to the Paralympics as well as sport peacebuilding initiatives for disabled people.

## UNESCO Nine Bases for a Culture of Peace<sup>9</sup>

1. Satisfaction of basic human necessities, including not only material needs, but also those which are political, social, juridical, cultural, etc.
2. Education for change, promoting values which guide people's actions in daily practice.
3. Freedom from myths, especially the myths and symbols which prevent people from taking personal responsibility for the future.
4. Demilitarization of defence, recognizing that the solution of conflicts does not necessarily require military force.
5. Demystification of threats, recognizing that others are not necessarily our enemies.
6. Feminization of culture, replacing the war system which is characterized by male-dominated social hierarchy and authority.
7. Critical consciousness engaged in the resolution of conflicts.
8. Respect for cultural identity, reversing the effects of imperialist and colonial policies and avoiding any tendency to impose a universal culture.
9. Empowerment of the 'small' - the people in the face of the state, human rights in the face of 'state security' - making possible the encounter of the human being with his surroundings in equilibrium and freedom from oppression.



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## Conclusion

Disabled people participating in sport on all levels and in particular Paralympic athletes have a lot to contribute to sport for peace and development. Disabled people live, promote and understand the importance of interdependence which is essential for peace. Furthermore the disabled people discourse is one of the few that looks at the impact of the cultural dynamic of ability expectations (want stage) and ableism (need stage). The purpose of sport is often reduced to the ability to outcompete others; and doping is often performed because the ability to outperform others is seen as essential due to the positive consequences that are perceived to follow that one outcompetes others. However, sport is more than about outcompeting others. If sport is to be used for peace and development, it will be important to look beyond the ability to outperform.

Given that disabled people, including Paralympic athletes, look at the world through the ability expectation and ableism lens, due to the fact that they are judged based on their abilities and often judged as lacking ‘essential’ abilities, they are perfectly situated to shape the discussion around what abilities ought to be included and how to prevent negative consequences in sport. They are the lived experience of ableism, which makes them perfectly situated to look at peace and development through the ability expectation lens.

## References

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