



Shaping Policy
Advancing Practice
Strengthening Accountability

United Nations Human Rights Council Panel Discussion on Sport and Human Rights

32nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council
28th June 2016, Geneva

Opening Remarks by John Morrison, Chief Executive, IHRB

Check against delivery.

I would like to thank the sponsors of this resolution for the opportunity to address the UN Human Rights Council today.

Sport is indeed a celebration of humanity, our common dignity and respect for all peoples. Mega-Sporting Events themselves are celebrations of this heritage and it is right that every global region should have an equal opportunity to share in this legacy. In a troubled world, sport is one of those unifiers that reminds us all of the universality of human rights. These events inspire young and old alike, and also create jobs, regenerate urban areas, bolster healthy living and promote positive public attitudes towards disabled people and other disadvantaged groups. Athletes and players all strive for excellence. We owe it to them to also strive for excellence when considering the multi-year lifecycle of the events themselves, from planning to delivery to legacy.

I can't run very fast, I have won no gold medals but my organization's contribution – is to work with you all to 'level the playing field': for the sake of athletes and spectators, but also the workers who build the stadia, who sit in the complex supply chains for construction or sports goods and other products, and the communities that live around the venues themselves or whose livelihoods may be affected.

It is a sad fact that very few of these events take place without some negative human rights impacts – from the forced evictions due to land clearances, the accidents and death of construction workers, violations by security forces, discrimination, restrictions on freedom of expression, to corruption at the local and international level. Just over the past two years, a number of cities have withdrawn from short-lists as local populations have decided not to host events. I know we can do better. I know we can restore the social licence of such events.

Striving for excellence means that our sports heroes, who train for so many years for perhaps only minutes of competition at a major event are rightly honoured by the thought and preparation we can put into delivering the event itself and learning from the legacy of previous events.

We are pleased that over the past two years a number of international sports bodies have made explicit commitments to human rights moving forward: first the Commonwealth Games Federation, then Formula One and now FIFA. We welcome Professor John Ruggie's report relating to application of human rights by FIFA, and also the International Olympic Committee's renewed commitment to non-discrimination and women's empowerment as part of its wider Olympic Agenda 2020 reforms. It is now beholden on all of us to move from commitments to practice.

I am here to announce today that a number of governments, international agencies, sports bodies, local organizing committees, sponsors, broadcasters, trade unions, NGOs and national human rights institutions, have come together for the first time to combine collective efforts to make Mega-Sporting Events a celebration of human rights in every sense.

These are organizations that have often been on opposing sides of the debate on the role of human rights in sport. We are working together, under the chair of Mary Robinson (known to you all as a former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) to develop a framework for learning, legacy and methods of accountability between sporting events and across sporting traditions. We are taking an evidence-based approach, using the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work as our starting points and bringing in lessons from many other business sectors and the experiences of other major events.

We would welcome governments to show expressions of interest in joining the process. Our next major gathering will be on 13-14 October 2016 when much of this evidence will be shared. I stand ready to answer your questions here today but also to invite you to learn more about our work.

Thank you.