
10th UNAOC Global Forum, Cascais, 25-27 November 2024

Thematic Panel 2: “Harnessing the unifying power of sports to promote peace and inclusivity: Sports diplomacy as a bridge-builder”

27 November 2024, 09:00 – 11:00, Estoril Convention Centre

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Sport, beyond its physical competition, is a universal language that transcends cultural, social, and political boundaries. It has an unparalleled ability to promote mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation, making it a critical force for social inclusion and peacebuilding in today’s world. Amid the complex global challenges of rising political polarization, social fragmentation, and violent extremism, sport stands out as a powerful tool to foster sustainable peace and development.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ reaffirms the growing role of sport in advancing tolerance, respect, and social inclusion, with a focus on empowering youth, women, and marginalized communities. Sport has the potential to bridge divides, empower vulnerable groups, and strengthen community resilience in the face of conflict, polarization, and violent extremism. Through its core values of fair play, respect, and solidarity, sport can help address societal challenges and support the creation of inclusive and cohesive societies. Sporting events, in particular, serve as powerful platforms for bringing people together across diverse cultures and backgrounds.² Lastly, the UN Pact for the Future³ highlights the role of culture and sport to foster a strong sense of identity and promote social cohesion.

In the context of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution, A/73/24, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) has identified sport as a key strategy in its mission to promote social inclusion and intercultural dialogue. By partnering with governments, United Nations entities, civil society, youth, and the private sector, UNAOC has worked to leverage sport as an instrument for peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Through initiatives like the Global Programme on Security of Major Sporting Events, the #OneHumanity campaign, and the Sport for One Humanity initiative, UNAOC has demonstrated how sport can contribute significantly to preventing violent extremism, fostering dialogue, and uniting communities across cultural, ethnic, and religious divides.⁴ These initiatives highlight the role of sports diplomacy in promoting peace, enhancing social cohesion, and building inclusive societies.

¹ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1, 2015. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

² UNAOC, UNOCT, UNICRI, ICSS, Preventing Violent Extremism through Major Sporting Events: A Handbook for Organizers, 2023. Available at: https://www.unaoc.org/wp-content/uploads/SportsHandbook_Final_final.pdf.

³ United Nations, Pact for the Future, para. 30, p. 11, available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/soft-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf

⁴ Miguel Ángel Moratinos, “The Richness of Diversity: Africa has won the EURO2024”, United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, 2024. Available at: <https://blog.unaoc.org/2024/07/the-richness-of-diversity-africa-has-won-the-euro2024/>.

This breakout session will showcase and explore best practices and lessons learned from various stakeholders involved in sport for peace. It will offer a platform for discussion on how sports diplomacy can continue to serve as a bridge-builder, encouraging further collaboration among governments, civil society, and the private sector to harness the unifying power of sport for a more inclusive, peaceful world.

The speakers will address the following guiding questions:

- How can sports diplomacy be more effectively used to promote dialogue, mutual understanding, and peace across cultural, religious, and national divides?
- What successful strategies have been used to leverage sport to promote social inclusion, particularly among marginalized and vulnerable groups?
- How can sport, particularly major sporting events and community-based programmes, be utilized to prevent violent extremism and foster peacebuilding efforts?
- What role can public-private partnerships, including corporate sponsors and sports organizations, play in advancing sports diplomacy and promoting peace and social cohesion?
- How can sport be used as a platform to empower youth to become agents of change in promoting peace, tolerance, and inclusion in their communities?
- What are the best practices and lessons learned from sport-based initiatives, and how can they be scaled and adapted to different regions or contexts to maximize their impact?
- How can innovative approaches in sports diplomacy be incorporated into future strategies to ensure that sports continue to contribute to the promotion of peace and inclusivity in an increasingly polarized world?