

# **NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS EVENT: OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE WITH SPORT**

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English Version



Centre for Sport  
& Human Rights

## Executive Summary

Human rights abuses can occur in sport, just as in any other sector. In sport, there have been human rights abuses in the form of discrimination, including sexism, racism, or homophobia, harassment and abuse, including the physical and sexual abuse of athletes and corruption. Similar to business, these abuses are outcomes of poor practices in sport. Whilst many business sectors have been engaging with human rights for many years now, the same cannot be said of sport. FIFA was the first sports federation to formally adopt a human rights policy at the international level in 2017. Federations such as the International Olympic Committee, Commonwealth Sport, UEFA, Formula 1 and the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie have developed strategies, charters, or position statements to better integrate human rights, but there remains a lot of awareness raising and capacity building to further embed human rights within the sector.

This is where National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are critical – as the domestic guardians of human rights within their jurisdictions, their expertise, and insight are grounded in the rule of law. As such, NHRIs make a natural ally in this space – allowing the work on sport and human rights to be cascaded down and implemented at a national level.

The purpose of this event was to bring together NHRIs and introduce them to the world of sport, including developing understanding of:

1. What human rights abuses can occur within sport
2. Why this topic is relevant for NHRIs
3. What work other NHRIs have done in this space, and what they can do to be more involved

The event was hosted by the Centre for Sport and Human Rights, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Forum of NHRIs, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and Unicef UK. Speakers included:

- **Alison Biscoe** – Head of Programme Development and Partnerships at the Centre for Sport and Human Rights
- **Sarah McGrath** – Director of International Engagement and Partnerships, Australian Human Rights Commission
- **Dr. Hyunsue Kim** – Former Head, Special Investigations Task Force on Human Rights in Sport, National Human Rights Commission of Korea
- **Michael Boyd** – Senior Engagement and Communications Specialist, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
- **Mwamus Mwamba** – President, National Human Rights Commission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

## Key Takeaways

- Mega Sporting Events (MSEs) create human rights risks across the entire lifecycle of the event. As a result, human rights are part of each phase of a major sporting event (planning, execution, and legacy).
- NHRIs are critical partners for ensuring trust of stakeholders when involved in stakeholder engagement processes. However, it is essential to adapt the language used during the consultation process to facilitate understanding – the process can be explained using concrete examples.
- NHRIs can also be critical partners when investigating cases of human rights abuse as they are independent actors – they should be considered as reporting channels
- Using a forum for sharing the NHRI engagements, actions, and other means is a good way to communicate and engage with stakeholders, as well as diversify activities, workshops, and other partnerships.
- NHRIs can ensure regular monitoring of the organisation of sporting events to evaluate risks and make sure human rights are respected.
- NHRIs need to establish partnerships with the rights actors and raise awareness of human rights for all the actors, including the local community.

## Summary of Discussion

**Alison Biscoe**, Head of Programme Development and Partnerships at the Centre for Sport and Human Rights (CSHR) introduced the event and asked several questions at the start of the session, including:

1. How can / have NHRIs supported a major event, and how that support continues through the planning and delivery of the event?
2. How can NHRIs support those who have been victims of human rights abuses in sports?
3. How can NHRIs support national federations in the different areas they are interested in at the national level?
4. How can NHRIs actively engage with upcoming events and use these events to optimise human rights in the country?

**Sarah McGrath**, Director of International Engagement and Partnerships at the Australian Human Rights Commission, focused on the human rights risk assessment they conducted for the next FIFA Women's World Cup in collaboration with the New Zealand Human Rights Commission. In order to be able to host major sporting events, States have to go through a bidding process. For FIFA tournaments, this now includes a human risk assessment which must assess the human rights situation in the country, and the possible risks and impacts of the tournament on human rights. The involvement of NHRIs in the risk assessment gave credibility to the process as they are independent organisations. This supports the building of trust with stakeholders, and also encourages people to come forward and engage. In order to assess all human rights risks, the Australian and New Zealand NHRIs developed a series of recommendations for FIFA and local organisers to consider. The assessment was conducted using the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). They also conducted desk-based research and met with



teams from FIFA to see which policies were already in place. Both NHRIs conducted extensive stakeholder engagement consultations meeting with 115 organisations. They considered risks across all phases of the lifecycle including considering human rights opportunities from the legacy of the tournament.

Three key stakeholder groups were identified including:

1. Players, coaches and support crew,
2. Workers, including supply chain workers and volunteers
3. Spectators and the local community

In total, 57 risks were identified, 25 of which were "T1" or critical. The key areas that were highlighted as risks included:

- All aspects of gender equality
- The vulnerability of young athletes and volunteers
- Accessibility and inclusion, especially for persons with disabilities
- Exploitation of migrant workers in high-risk sectors
- Meaningful engagement with First Nations people
- Media representation of minority groups and people with diverse backgrounds

The Australian Human Rights Commission, together with their colleagues in New Zealand, published a [report](#) including all recommendations made in the risk assessment, to serve as a guide for major events being hosted in the country over the next decade.

**Dr. Hyunsue Kim** is the Former Head of the Special Investigations Task Force on Human Rights in Sport at the National Human Rights Commission of South Korea. He discussed how for decades now, being on an elite sports team has meant victory was the top priority. Issues such as the physical hitting of athletes and other inhumane treatment in training sessions, such as sexual abuse emerged in sport across the country – this was especially true of elite student athletes. Abuse was widely accepted as part of the training and just something athletes had to withstand. Change began to happen when in January 2019, just a year after South Korea hosted the Winter

Olympics in Pyeongchang, a famous Korean speed skater from the national team came forward accusing her coach of physical and sexual assault starting when she was just 17 years old.

The Special Investigations Task Force within the National Human Rights Commission was established to begin tackling many of these issues. They have worked on many abuse cases and conducted an investigation into abuse which was conducted in three phases:

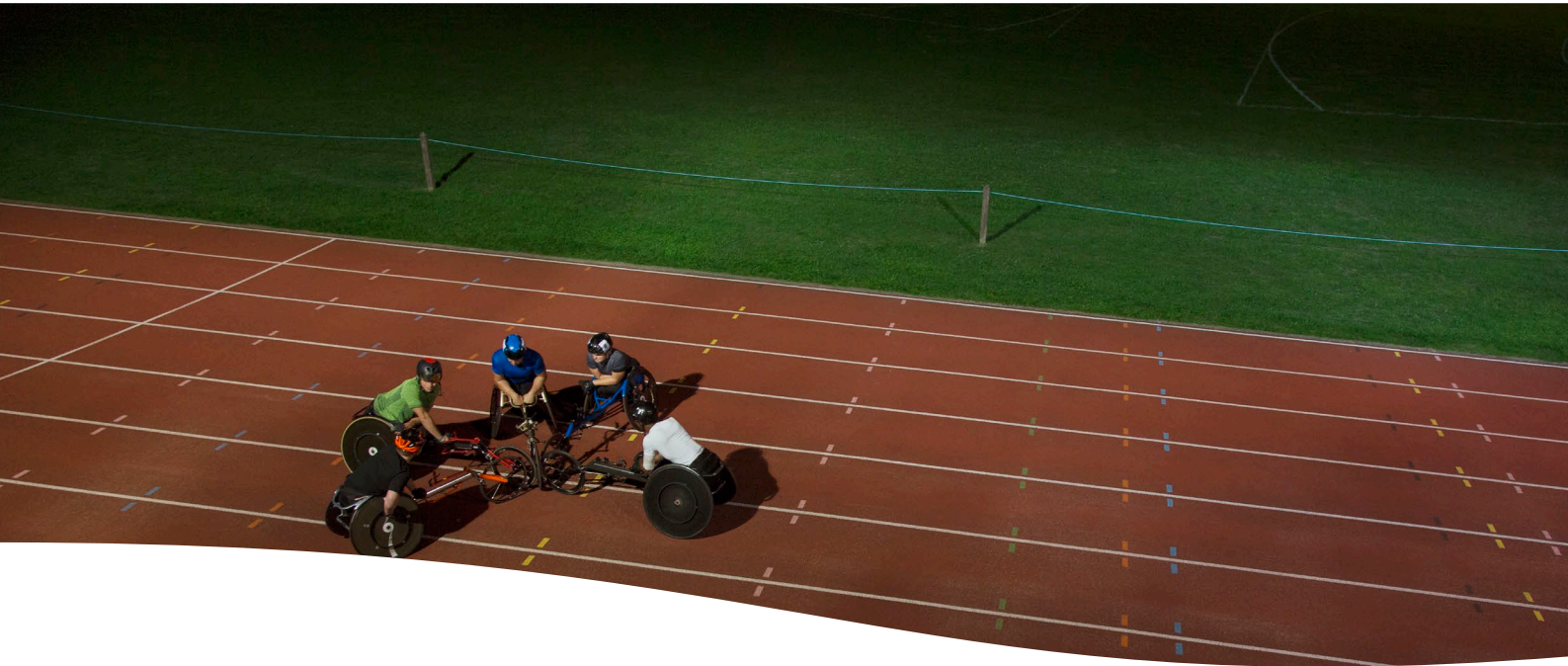
1. The first phase consisted of surveys, including on student athletes. Some of the findings from these surveys included the fact that nearly 80% of victims did not feel able to effectively respond to the situation, either because they were afraid of retaliation or they simply did not know how to cope. The surveys also found that the older an athlete got, the more likely they were to experience violence. It was concluded that as they became more professional in their sport, exit routes out became harder to take, and human rights violations became easier
2. The second phase was the investigation, including looking into how sport is violating human rights and providing recommendations to review policies
3. The third phase looked to review the implementation process. An action plan was made to ensure organisations take action to promote human rights in sport.

**Michael Boyd**, who works in engagement and communication at the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC), spoke about what the NIHRC has done to engage national federations, what are some of the day-to-day concerns sport bodies have on human rights and how NHRIs can support national federations to embody human rights in sport. NIHRC has been engaging on sport and human rights since 2016 and working to embed human rights within and through sport by publishing their [Sport and Human Rights Declaration](#) and establishing their Sports and Human Rights Forum. Some more examples of their work include:

- The NIHRC has partnered with NSPCC to position trust law to be extended to sports coaches to help create a safer environment for children
- Partnered with the Commonwealth Games to hold a forum for NHRIs in Kigali on sport and human rights.
- Supported the launch of Trust Project – new sport and human rights training resource
- Hosting various conferences on sport and human rights

Michael then provided more information on the Sport and Human Rights Forum which is made up of 40 multi-stakeholder members, 10 of whom have signed the Declaration on Sport and Human Rights. By interacting with these stakeholders, the NIHRC lends its expertise, making sure that key issues such as racism, sectarianism in sport (post-conflict society), or child rights are addressed, and stakeholders are exposed to these issues through the work of international speakers, local practitioners, and academics. At the next Forum in May, the NIHRC will focus on disabilities rights in sport, addressing the questions of access to sport, but also access to facilities, the inclusion of athletes with disabilities in sport, and others.

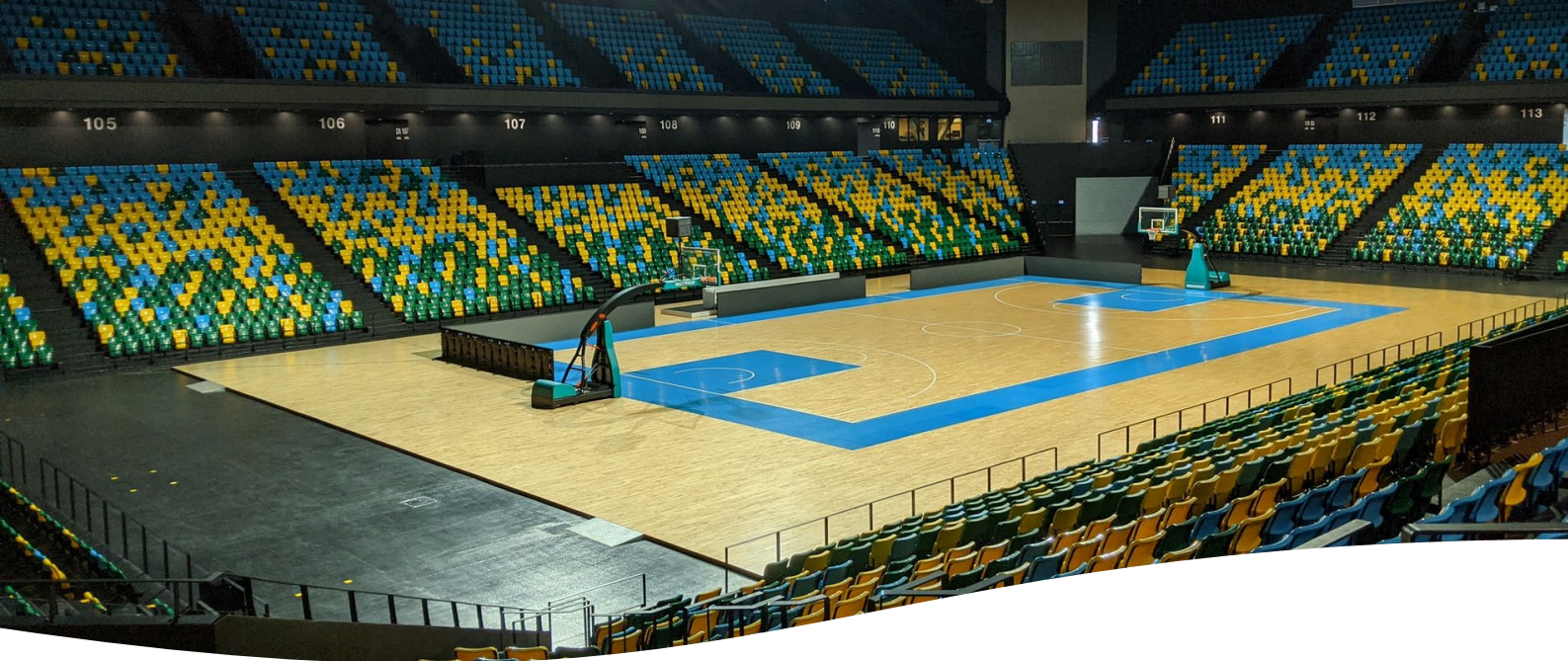




Looking forward, following the increase of members, and requests from sports bodies to develop policies around human rights, the NIHRC is committed to helping them. In addition, it plans to launch a podcast series which will talk about its members and the good work they do for people through sport. It has already created an annual conference in partnership with Ulster. The NIHRC also does sports and human rights workshops in prisons, as well as schools, colleges, and community groups alongside charities. Michael presented many tangible ways NHRIs can engage around sport to advance human rights.

**Mwamus Mwamba**, President of the National Human Rights Commission of the Democratic Republic of Congo spoke about mega-sporting events and how to gather different actors such as athletes, fans, media, workers, construction projects, supply chains, merchandising, and others. He noted that MSEs can have both positive and negative effects on human rights. To this end, the DRC needs to ensure that civil and political rights, cultural, social, and economic rights, as well as fundamental rights from the international instruments is part of their work. To meet this objective, they have put several plans in place, including:

- Taking the initiative to ensure regular monitoring of the organisation of the Francophonie Games (which the DRC will be hosting in 2023), to evaluate how to ensure best practices are maintained and lessons learned from the last Games hosted in Côte d'Ivoire.
- Establishing a framework with the National Committee of the Francophonie Games to contribute to the promotion and the protection of human rights by promoting education on human rights and ensuring the respect of human rights during the organisation of the Games. The goal is to have meetings to create awareness on the respect of human rights in every action related to the Games.
- Hosting meetings during the event itself
- Creating a "green number" available for everyone to call in case of human rights violations so they can lodge a complaint.
- Increasing awareness of stakeholders, including the national police and the Congolese population, by running workshops with the High Council of the Francophonie Games



Following an overview of the different ways NHRIs can engage on sport and human rights from speakers, participants were invited to attend a breakout room discussion going deeper into the topics discussed.

### Breakout Room 1

#### How NHRIs can support on human rights requirements of a major event bid

- Risk assessments need to be thought out many years in advance, at least five years before the event. Furthermore, understanding the parameters and the context of the local community can be time-consuming and needs to be considered as soon as possible.
- Risk assessments are an opportunity for NHRIs to educate civil society on the possible human rights risks and impacts, including possibly through academic partnerships or national action plans.
- The language barrier is a challenge, as it is difficult to create awareness of sports and human rights issues when the concept is not understood – sometimes it is necessary to provide concrete examples.

### Breakout Room 2

#### How NHRIs can support on human rights abuses that arise in sport

- Human rights abuses such as racism can come from the fans, which leads to the question of who is responsible for the actions of the fans? In Scotland, clubs prefer to turn a blind eye so as to not upset fans and make them feel attacked.
- In South Korea, the basketball federation chose to ban fans from the stadium after a racist provocation against a black athlete, however, they also had to shut down the comments section online, where it was more difficult to control abusive statements.
- In South Korea, it is the NHRI's Special Investigation Task Force that directly receives complaints about human rights abuses in sport – an important pathway to remedy that could be replicated in other countries.





### Breakout Room 3

#### How NHRIs can collaborate on human rights with sport federations at national level

- Discussed the discrimination in Georgia women's football clubs, where complaints have been brought regarding the absence of doctors in women's clubs, while it is compulsory for men's clubs. In addition, women do not have any labour protections for when they are pregnant or on maternity level.
- In Portugal, complaints have been made about agents' fees and children's rights regarding the transfers of players / athletes.
- In India, there is an increase in awareness regarding sports and human rights, as the number of revelations and complaints rises – athletes were nervous and afraid, which in some cases, resulted in emotional breakdowns and even suicide.
- In Cameroon, the football federation was accused of discrimination regarding the representative election of the federation.

### Breakout Room 4

#### How NHRIs can actively engage around an upcoming major sporting event

- The transfer of information is essential in communication, formation, and awareness.
- Analysing the risk is important and needs to include vulnerable groups such as women, children, persons with disabilities, and others.
- The Human Rights Commission has to establish the rules on human rights risks with States and Committees from the beginning of the project.



## Next steps and additional opportunities to get involved

- A roadmap for embedding human rights – the number of sport federations with formal human rights policies and processes is very low. Therefore, the Centre is looking to create a roadmap outlining, in very plainspoken language, how sport federations can develop such a process. This will be piloted with sport bodies, and should be a useful tool for everyone, including NHRIs
- Stakeholder engagement guide – as part of this roadmap, a best practice model for how to engage with stakeholders will also be developed – something many organisations get wrong. This guide would certainly benefit from the input of NHRIs who are experts in this area
- Affected person-centred approach to remedy – Finally, the Centre is currently undertaking a research project that looks at finding appropriate remedies in sport. We have found that in many cases, sport federations can make things worse when faced with a major human rights abuse, either because their first instinct is to protect their reputation or because they simply do not know how to handle the case sensitively. This project will therefore be informed by interviews and focus groups of those who have been affected. The first phase of this project will look specifically at how to conduct safe and appropriate investigations into non-accidental violence and abuse in day-to-day sport. NHRIs who have experience in working with affected people and have experience in investigations, will be very welcome to participate in this research project.
- NHRI Resource Hub – Finally, to share the good practice being done by NHRIs, the Centre will seek to develop a resource hub – essentially, a web page where all the work on sport and human rights done by NHRIs can be found in one place for more efficient knowledge sharing. Any NHRI with resources to share is welcome and encouraged to get in touch with the Centre.



# CONTACT

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