



## Presentation on the Centre for Sport and Human Rights

European Parliament Sub-Committee on Human Rights:  
Exchange of views on sports and human rights  
in the context of large sporting events,  
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Delivered by Alison Biscoe,  
**Project Coordinator, Mega-Sporting Events**  
Institute for Human Rights and Business

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you all today. I am here to represent the newly established Centre for Sport and Human Rights, and to deliver remarks on behalf of its Acting CEO, John Morrison of the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) – the organisation incubating the Centre in its first two years. The Centre's full-time CEO will be in place by early 2019. The Centre will be based in Geneva, Switzerland with the support of the Government of Switzerland and many other stakeholders.

I will aim to answer three questions in this presentation:

- 1) In the Centre's view, what is the opportunity that sport creates for promoting human rights?
- 2) How has the Centre worked to capitalize on this opportunity and achieve meaningful progress?
- 3) How will the Centre respond to challenges and continue to push for progress moving forward?

First, some background: The Centre for Sport and Human Rights was officially launched in June 2018. It is the culmination of collective action by a range of sports bodies, governments, intergovernmental organisations (including the European External Action Service), businesses, trade unions and NGOs. There are currently 40 organisations from around the world on the Centre's Advisory Council including four EU member states (Germany, UK, Slovenia and the Netherlands) and we have been in active dialogue with the European Commission during the past year. At the European level, UEFA and the OSCE are also amongst the members of the Advisory Council.

Our work in this area began in 2012 following the London Olympics. The then Chair of the Commission for a Sustainable London 2012 approached IHRB looking to house, and ultimately share, many of the learnings compiled during the Games. Over time, this work gained enough traction to host a high-level meeting in Glion, Switzerland and eventually, a commitment to establish the Mega-Sporting Events Platform for Human Rights.

The Platform examined key human rights risks linked to mega-sporting events as they related to sports bodies, host actors, sponsors, and broadcasters, as well as athletes, children and other vulnerable groups. The findings were published in early 2017 as a series of 11 White Papers and were then further developed into tools to support the different stakeholder groups in conducting due diligence and ensuring respect for human rights throughout all stages of the mega-sporting event lifecycle.

The mission of the new Centre is to take these learnings forward in practical ways: to work toward a world of sport that fully respects human rights by sharing knowledge, building capacity, and increasing accountability of all actors through collective action and promotion of the Sporting Chance Principles (a set of principles developed jointly with the stakeholders involved in the MSE Platform, framing different actors' commitment to uphold human rights in the mega-sporting event context).

### **Why did we get involved in this work? What is the opportunity that sport creates for promoting human rights?**

Firstly, sport has reach like nothing else. Looking at players themselves, there are nearly 1 billion people worldwide who play volleyball, nearly 500 million who play basketball, and nearly 300 million playing football. From a fans perspective, at its peak, 3.4 billion people watched the World Cup in Russia this summer (nearly half the world's population).

When we think of the groups affected by sport, these numbers mean that the negative impacts can be that much more detrimental, but the positive impacts have the potential to be that much more beneficial.

We also believe that sport is a natural ally in the human rights debate. Many of the sports bodies themselves recognise values such as tolerance, respect, fair play and non-discrimination in their own charters. While the autonomy of sport seeks to safeguard these values against political, legal or commercial influences, it cannot be used as a mechanism to avoid accountability, especially accountability towards those most vulnerable.

### **How is the Centre working to capitalise on this opportunity and achieve meaningful progress?**

We recognise the many opportunities sport provides and see sport as a force for good in society. Sport is also a new and unique entry point in advancing respect for human rights around the world. The Centre will continue to encourage collective action to ensure that those who stand to both benefit and lose the most from sporting events are at the core of its work, whilst delivering activities designed to share knowledge, build capacity and increase accountability throughout the world of sport.

On sharing knowledge, the Centre already acts as a facilitator for dialogue between diverse stakeholders (I already mentioned the 40+ organisations on our Advisory Council) and formalises this process through the annual Sporting Chance Forum – this year to be held in Paris at UNESCO, coinciding with the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Forum brings together hundreds of stakeholders from across the world of sport with previous speakers including tennis legend Martina Navratilova, IOC President Thomas Bach, and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad al Hussein. The Forum serves as an opportunity to raise key issues that many in sport face, but few know how to effectively manage. For example, last year’s Forum included a session looking at various forms of discrimination towards women in sport, and this year, a panel is being organised on adult survivors of child abuse in sport to hear personal accounts so that atrocities like that which happened in US Gymnastics can be prevented.

On capacity building, the Centre has a growing number of strong partnerships including with hosts of upcoming sporting events in Tokyo and Qatar. In Tokyo, the Centre has worked closely with the local Olympics organising committee TOCOG on developing a grievance mechanism for its Sustainable Sourcing Code, and continues to work with the organisation to further improve this mechanism. In Qatar, in preparation for hosting the football World Cup, the Centre has worked closely with the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy and FIFA on the newly established Worker Welfare Standards and improving labour conditions on stadium sites in the country. The Centre will expand this work in the years ahead, supporting sports bodies on embedding human rights into their governance and operations, as well as into their bid requirements, as FIFA and others have already done. It will also work on the ground with local organising committees to ensure human rights due diligence is embedded throughout every stage of a mega-sporting event lifecycle, and will seek to amplify the voices of those affected and increase their capacity to effectively engage with governments, sports bodies, businesses and others on issues concerning them.

Finally, the purpose of sharing knowledge and building capacity of actors in and around the world of sport is ultimately about increasing accountability within the sector. Much like Pillar 3 of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, this will be one of the most difficult, but most important tasks for the Centre, and is likely to be the area in which the Centre's success will be judged in the years ahead. Already, a project is underway on remedy in the sport context with a recent event at the Peace Palace in the Hague looking at both existing and potential human rights remedies in the world of sport as well as those relating to business.

### **How will the Centre respond to challenges and continue to push for progress moving forward?**

In addition to the functions already mentioned, the Centre will respond to new challenges by continuing to work collectively and focusing on different areas of intervention. A first critical task for us all is to respond effectively to known human rights risks of those most affected by sport. These groups can be classed into six broad categories: athletes, fans, workers, volunteers, local communities, and journalists. In addition, there are specific cross-cutting vulnerabilities that will require special consideration including: age (children face a specific set of risks, but also possess unique rights), gender (with women and girls being more vulnerable), sexual orientation, marginalised groups, including migrants, ethnic minorities and indigenous people, disability (those both physically and / or mentally less-abled) and activists (with several cases of human rights defenders being particularly targeted around major events). Ensuring the voices of these groups are heard and systematically integrated into not only the Centre's work, but the policies and actions of the world of sport more broadly, will be critical in ensuring meaningful progress going forward.

A second key task ahead is working constructively with actors responsible for implementation and financing, in other words the sports bodies, local organising committees, governments, and businesses. They must have the necessary knowledge and capacity to be able to truly embed human rights due diligence processes throughout their operations. There are currently four sports bodies (FIFA, UEFA, the IOC and the Commonwealth Games Federation) who have made formal human rights commitments as part of their broader social responsibilities, policies and practices. In many cases, this has also led to embedding human rights provisions into bidding requirements. The Paris 2024 Olympics, for example, will be the first mega-sporting event which has human rights requirements in the host city contract, and we have already seen comprehensive human rights risk assessments coming out of the FIFA 2026 bidding process.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to speak to you all today and to share information on the Centre's developing activities. More information on our work is available at: [www.sporhumanrights.org](http://www.sporhumanrights.org) including on the 2018 Sporting Chance Forum in Paris on 12-13 December at UNESCO. We would welcome your participation in this event, at which we also mark the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Thank you.