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### INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT ON SPORT FOR ALL

### SPORT FOR ALL - A PLATFORM FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

#### INTRODUCTION

The world has transformed into a bastion of aggression, away from the order of creation where tranquility existed in the garden of Eden. Man, and his environment enjoyed peace and co-existence which made the world a better place. It was a perfect world with no carbon emissions from automobiles, fast foods, littering, and lifestyle ailments. Man ate healthy foods and fruits, was tasked to work and keep the garden and thus was physically active and fit (Genesis 2:15).

No doubt the order of creation has greatly transformed. Man lives in the fast lane. Everything has become instant. There is instant food, crops and livestock now grow faster and Man now travels faster in automobiles and aviation instruments, all I've name of civilization and modernity. The downside of this ingenuity and generational transformation has been that Man has led a more sedentary lifestyle, eating more refined foodstuffs which have contributed to reduced lifespan from the original order of creation as stated by Moses in Psalms 90:10 (The years of our life are seventy' or even by reason and strength eighty....). Strength comes out of exercising the body as such, both scripture and science attest to the power of physical activity and exercise as directly contributing towards longevity and healthy lifestyles.

The change of the order of creation meant that Man had to fend for himself and ultimately competition for resources led to conflict, misunderstandings and ultimately wars and aggression. The peace and tranquility that the world enjoyed for years became threatened and the preoccupation of man became that of survival and competing for more resources, in the process neglecting fundamentals of healthy lifestyle. It is true to this day that the use of elevators has replaced staircases in buildings. Tracking from one point to the other has become a symbol of poverty as the world now competes in driving the latest and most expensive automobiles, while in the process diminishing the need to be physically active and healthy.

As people gets along with their business, generations have detached one form the other especially in the advent of technology and digital transformation. The oral heritage in the African context has been severely affected as unitary societies have been built through technological advancements. The passing on of oral historical value systems and heritage from one generation to the other has been disrupted and the existing violence, aggression and prevalence of crime and

unrest can be attributed with some measure of accuracy, as evidence of a society that has lost generational interdependence.

Society is this crying loud for a tool that can bring back peace and tranquility among its people, among nations and among global communities that have for long been divided along discriminatory materialistic, political, religious, ethnic, ideological and cultural lines. The divisions have fanned global violence, discrimination, inequalities and exclusion of some sections of society such a women, children and people living with disabilities as well as other vulnerable members of society. Sport has been proven to be that tool, that conduit and that catalyst for promoting peace and reconciliation in the world. Like the late former President of South Africa - Nelson Mandela famously said, ***“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where there was only despair”*** Indeed Sport has the power to change the world. When ten (10) athletes from four (4) countries competed under the Olympic flag as the Refugee Olympic Team (the first of its kind) at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the IOC President said of this initiative, ***“This will be a symbol of hope for all refugees in the world and will make the world better aware of the magnitude of this crisis. It is also a signal to the international community that refugees are our fellow human beings and are an enrichment to society.”*** Sport therefore has proven itself over the years that it is indeed one of those very powerful tools of promoting peace and reconciliation.

## **SPORT FOR ALL AS A TOOL FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION**

When the former South African President Nelson Mandela worked tirelessly for South Africa to host and win the 1995 Rugby World Cup, the ability of sport to unite a fragile and racially divided nation was palpable. The country needed healing and the conciliatory power of sport never disappointed as the right choice over a militant stance and desire to revenge. The country dropped prejudices and embraced Nelson Mandela’s vision of reconciliation leading South Africa’s Springboks’ 15-12 victory over New Zealand’s All Blacks in a packed 60,000 stadium.

The Region 5 Youth Games have existed for over two decades since inception in 2004 when Mozambique hosted the inaugural edition. The Games bring together youth under the age of twenty (20) to compete in a multi-sport event for a period of ten days. Most of these athletes are drawn from humble backgrounds and will be crossing the borders of their countries for the first time. Some will have been identified from poverty-stricken rural communities and selected to represent their countries with pride. The through of embarking on the first flight on the aero plane, acquiring the first passport and wearing national colors for the first time, inspire not only the athlete but unites the communities from where they come from. Sporting icons have been produced form each edition further adding to the inspiration and social cohesion of Southern African countries through the power of sport.

Sport for all has continued to play that significant role towards nation building as it has afforded non-discriminatory access to opportunities and facilities for all sections of society. The Region 5 Walk for Life and the Paralympic Week Festivals has transformed over the years into formidable community-based events that bring together people from all walks of life. Similar events like “The

Big Walk” in South, “Shukuma” in Eswatini and the “Women Sport Festival” in Zimbabwe have borne testimony to the magnetic ability of sport for all to build societies and forging stronger and United bonds among people of Southern Africa.

During all Region 5 meetings, the tradition of morning walks and social sport has galvanized the people of Southern Africa into a strong United community. Every morning during meetings, events and tournament, Ministers, Directors and staff from sports organisations join in recreational activities that build string bonds and break hierarchical barriers. This initiative has been cascaded to country level where both young and old from different religious, political, cultural and ideological backgrounds converge to enjoy sport and recreation activities. Through the Region 5 Women4Women programme, a total of 500,000 women from diverse backgrounds are expected to be physically active and involved in pursuit of sport and reaction activities of their choice. This is meant to promote peace and reconciliation and develop a generation of citizens that are engendered on a rich African cultural value system.

## **PROMOTING INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE**

African culture is strongly embedded upon the power of intergenerational dialogue, aimed at creating space for dialogue necessary to develop transformative strategies and perspectives. Intergenerational dialogue is aimed at maximizing development potential of the youth through mentorship from the mature citizens in society. As earlier mentioned, history and moral values in Africa are mainly passed orally from generation to generation.

An important percentage of African population lives under the line of poverty and exclusion. The situation is reflected on the increased rate of violence where gangs with close connection with other type of criminal activities take control of regular activities of the communities. Even though the rate of illiteracy has dropped significantly as new generations have more access to education, the rise in unemployment and lack of educational opportunities to stimulate personal development continue to increase the risk of young people using illegal means of eking out a living.

Intercultural dialogue has been considered as one way of promoting and sharing experiences between older and younger generations. It further helps improve and decrease the levels of violence while promoting long-term solutions for the community risks.

Sport for all activities provide a unique platform for intergenerational dialogue as society has been skewed more towards elitist competitive sport thereby excluding the older generations from interfacing with the young.

The Region 5 Walk for Life programme for instance, is embedded in the regional marathon event. It includes the 42km marathon 10km and 5km runs and for elite athletes while the older generation of our society are catered for in the 2km fun walk and other less strenuous physical activities. The event further incorporates workshops on various topical issues that could be cultural, traditional or based on value systems. That provides a platform for the elderly to engage with the youth to bridge the generational gap while using the platforms to pass on valuable cultural value systems to the young generation. Such dialogues have led to increased awareness on inclusion of people living

with disabilities as well as improved gender sensitivity. It is arguably one of the most effective ways of promoting nation building and social cohesion through the power of sport or all.

## **CONCLUSION**

The power of sport for all in building strong sustainable societies is undisputed. Sport for all has stimulated African societies' ability to harness demographic dividends through investing in youth. The immense power of sport for all in silencing guns and promoting peace and reconciliation among societies has remained the pillar of nation building in Southern Africa. The role of the elderly in intergenerational dialogues has added a dimension of cultural and identity perpetuity that gives Africa a distinct and unique selling point as a people. This adds a valuable dimension to the scripture from Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians 9:26-27 when he says, "*So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*" Sport for all helps direct the value of physical activity and exercise to a targeted goal - that of healthy lifestyle and fitness as well as intergenerational dialogue for nation building and values education. Sport for all must never be aimless. It must be focused on building families, communities, societies, nations and building the world!

Thank you for your kind attention

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