

**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace**

6 April 2023

On this International Day, our Organization celebrates the virtues and universal values of sport. It hopes to remind us how much the practice of sport, which allows us to care for both our physical and mental health, also carries with it the ethical principle of peaceful coexistence, something which we particularly need in these troubled times.

By learning to work together as a team, by observing the rules of respect, equity and fair play – even in defeat – sportsmen and sportswomen are promoting citizenship and peace.

It is these rules, and above all the values and ethics of sport, which UNESCO promotes and defends, particularly through the International Convention against Doping in Sport – the only international standard through which 191 governments work together to preserve integrity in sport.

Sport, as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has reminded us, is central to individuals' physical and psychological well-being. The decrease in physical activity is therefore a major issue in terms of both physical and mental health. This is all the more worrying since it particularly affects young people today.

In this context, the work of the International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS), which is taking place in June in Baku, Azerbaijan, is awaited with notable interest. MINEPS will make it possible to assess the progress made in ensuring access to sport for all and to determine what remains to be done, particularly as regards training professionals and financing.

In respect of the central question of financing, UNESCO, as part of the Coalition for Sustainable Development through Sport, is currently working with development banks to eventually reduce the inequalities between countries when it comes to access to sport; these inequalities are especially great in Africa.

Because inequalities also stem from people's mentalities, we must also combat stereotypes, particularly gender stereotypes, which affect access to sport.

We are working closely with the International Olympic Committee and UN-Women, with which we have founded the Global Observatory for Women, Sport, Physical Education and Physical Activity, to understand the barriers to sport which women continue to face.

Finally, in order to encourage the practice of sport by one and all, UNESCO has launched an important initiative. Fit for Life will make it possible to provide a major overview of sport practices and to inform global reflection on how to better integrate sport into public policies.

In sum, on this day, UNESCO wishes to encourage investment in sport for the well-being of our societies. It also wishes to remind everyone that sport is more than just the practice of an activity - it is also the embodiment of ethical principles.