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Press Conference to present “Sport for all. Cohesive, Accessible and Tailored to each person” – International Summit for the presentation of the Declaration on Sport

At 12.30 today, in the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to present “Sport for all. Cohesive, Accessible and Tailored to each person” – International Summit for the presentation of the Declaration on Sport, to take place in the Vatican’s New Synod Hall from 29 to 30 September 2022.

The speakers were: the Reverend Fr. Alexandre Awi Mello, ISch., secretary of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life; the Reverend Msgr. Melchor Sánchez de Toca y Alameda, Dicastery for Culture and Education; Dr. Santiago Perez de Camino, responsible for Sport Pastoral Care, Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life; Dr. Tegla Loroupe, multiple world half-marathon champion and president of the *Tegla Loroupe* Peace Foundation, Kenya; and Dr. Rodrigo Hübner Mendes, president of the *Rodrigo Mendes* Institute, Brazil.

The following are the interventions by the Reverend Fr. Alexandre Awi Mello, ISch., and the Reverend Msgr. Melchor Sánchez de Toca y Alameda:

Intervention by the Reverend Fr. Alexandre Awi Mello, ISch.

Dear friends,

We meet again here to present the International Summit on social inclusion through sport, “Sport for All”, organized by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, together with the Dicastery for Culture and Education, with the collaboration of the John Paul II Foundation for Sport in Italy.

By now, six years have passed since the International Conference “*Sport at the Service of Humanity*”, and four years since the publication of the first Holy See document on sport, “Giving the best of yourself”. They are two important landmarks in the relationship between the Church and sport, which have helped make the Church feel at home in sport, and sport at home in the Church. And in the meantime, we have lived through a pandemic, which has made us reexamine many things and reshape our priorities as people and as Christians.

If anything came out of these months of the pandemic, as repeated many times by Pope Francis, it is that *no-one saves themselves alone*. And this also applies to the world of sport. The reality is that we find ourselves faced with a world that is very often moved only by personal interests, where people do things if there is a material or economic benefit behind it; in a world divided between those who are at war and in difficulty, and those – us - who often look away.

In this context, it may be thought that talking about sport is not appropriate, or even that it is not the right moment to do so. On the contrary, it is: because with many wars, divisions, much loneliness after the pandemic... sport can help a great deal. This time of planning and restructuring after the pandemic is the ideal opportunity to create new principles so that sport may truly play a role, as Pope Francis underlined in the prologue of the document “Giving the best of yourself”, as a tool for encounter, formation and also mission and sanctification.

In past years, we have seen how professional sport often became increasingly closed in on itself, without clear references and principles. Instead, when sport puts the person at the centre, the temptations of corruption, winning at any cost, or the commodification of the body are overcome. Cohesion in sport is fundamental because it helps us reshape and develop sport for all. As a community.

The main purpose of the Summit is to urge the world of sport and international, regional and local politics to embrace the Declaration that the participants will present by committing themselves to work for the integration of people in society through sport, especially people with physical, intellectual and relational disabilities, migrants and refugees, prisoners, youth and the elderly, women, and so on.

Furthermore, this Summit will endeavour to motivate sporting bodies to reduce the existing division between professional and amateur sport, so that the sense of play, friendship and gratuitousness is not lost.

I would like to emphasize that this Summit is not intended to be seen merely as a moment made up of “fine words”. The two Dicasteries have made a great effort to bring together different bodies, at all levels, so that this Declaration that will be signed in the presence of the Holy Father may be transformed into tangible facts.

We will continue to promote these reflections in the world of the laity, to try to put into practice the concrete initiatives to highlight people’s interest in building a better world, also through sport.

Intervention of the Reverend Msgr. Melchor Sánchez de Toca y Alameda

From 5 to 6 October 2016, we held the first *World Conference on Sport and faith, Sport at the Service of Humanity* in the Vatican, and gave a Declaration of principles: Compassion, Respect, Balance, Enlightenment, Love, Joy. The conference rested on three major pillars: Inspiration (sport for life), Inclusion (sport for all), and Involvement (sport for change).

The conference we are about to begin, six years later, is in continuity with the first and develops, in particular, the concept of inclusion, sport for all. Now, inclusion seems to be a fashionable concept. Everyone talks about it; in many social policy programmes, sport is introduced under the heading of inclusion. But what is inclusion really? And if we say “sport for all”, what does this mean in practice? Here is what the conference is intended to explore, with a call to action.

We say that sport is good for us. Everyone says this. It is confirmed by the statistics produced by health bodies. The World Health Organization has launched a programme of sport and health to promote health and wellbeing through physical activity, healthy eating, combatting loneliness and fighting addictions. The indices of happiness, where they can be measured, show unequivocally that people who do physical activity or sport show better overall condition. Then we have the Icelandic case as an example in the fight against alcohol and drug addiction,

and the Norway case that is proving to be a true cradle of sports champions in all areas.

Sport, therefore, is good for us. But, more important still, sport *is* a good, a precious good that must be protected, in the same way that we protect our most cherished cultural assets and our literary heritage, language, and cultural expressions. It must be defended against the threats that undermine and disfigure it, the phenomena of degradation in sport, certainly. In order to be healthy, sport requires safe environments, where activities and relationships can develop in a healthy manner, avoiding abuses of any kind, with the sharing of best practices for safeguarding.

It is precisely because sport is good that it must be placed within reach of all. Everyone should be able to experience the excitement of sport, the result obtained through sustained effort over time, the thrill of victory or a small triumph, humility and wisdom in defeat, the meaning of teamwork, and all this regardless of the condition of the person practicing it. Sport for all means allowing all people to experience sport, in the same way that we would like everyone to have the opportunity to experience the emotion of music or art.

This is the intuition behind the Summit, which is expressed through three major concepts: cohesive, accessible, tailor-made sport.

Cohesive sport. Basically, this means overcoming the growing gap between elite sport, professional sport, and grassroots sport, popular sport, for everyone. Professional sport is becoming more and more market- and performance-driven, and therefore less and less accessible to all. Grassroots sport is not immune to this logic, indeed it is often infected by it, to the point that we see the use of doping in popular races, in gyms, all in pursuit of a better performance. *Cohesive sport* means fighting for solidarity within sport, between the elite and the grassroots, the elite and the grassroots, applying the principle of solidarity within it.

Communiter. This principle is embodied in the addition to the Olympic motto desired by President Bach: *communiter*, in addition to the three well-known *altius- citius- fortius*. The pursuit of excellence, yes, but *communiter*, together.

Accessible: Continuing with the metaphor of cultural heritage, this is a question of eliminating the barriers, not architectural but cultural, that prevent certain categories of people from participating in sport, or from doing so in adequate conditions: we are talking about access of children, and especially girls and women to sport, but not only. We must also consider the elderly, people in situations of exclusion and poverty, refugees and migrants, detainees and prisoners, people with disabilities of every type, physical, relational and mental. Every organization should be able to include sport as a part of formative educational processes: schools, parishes, companies...

Tailor-made: Finally, it represents the opposite movement. If by accessibility we talk about everyone's access to sport, here, when talking about customised sport, we are talking about the movement of sport towards people. All agents in the world of sport must make an effort to imagine how to reach those who do not want to or cannot participate in sport. Not to increase profits, but to carry out a social mission, not just a superficial *greenwashing*, but concrete actions with an impact on their territory.

How will the Summit take place?

1. Reports. The three main concepts will be developed by three major representatives of institutions. Cohesive sport: Thomas Bach, IOC President. Accessible sport, Filippo Grandi, President of UNHCR; Sport tailored to each person, Andrew Parsons, President of the International Paralympic Committee. In addition, Bishop Gobillard, bishop in charge of relations with the Paris 2024 LOC Committee, will speak about the community dimension of sport.

2. Round Tables. In addition to these three major speeches, there will be two large round tables, with the participation of representatives from various international agencies, Caritas, Unesco, Special Olympics, and testimonies from athletes. The aim is to bring different voices into dialogue. The conviction is that no one is saved alone.

3. Working groups. Participants will be invited to discuss these issues in working groups, about ten: four English, three Italian, one Spanish, one French.

4. We have also reserved small spaces for sponsors and institutions supporting the conference. It is only right to mention the Italian Olympic Committee, the Italian Paralympic Committee, Sport Salute, and Duferco, in addition to the sponsors you will find in the folder.

EXTRAS

A cultural evening in the Vatican Museums highlighting the key thread linking cultural heritage to the good of sport is planned. A Holy Mass is planned on Friday morning for those who wish to attend.

THE DECLARATION

Finally, the Vatican declaration will be presented on Friday afternoon in the presence of the Holy Father, who will address a special greeting to the participants by meeting them in the Paul VI Hall. Some athletes, representing the most vulnerable groups, and representatives of the institutions will then sign the Vatican declaration.

This declaration is in reality a *declare-action*, a call to action. A conference like this is useless if it does not turn into action, if it remains a self-celebration. True inclusion is done in the streets, with concrete actions and not with words. The Summit will be a success if it translates into concrete actions.
