



Press release

IOC AND UNAIDS JOIN FORCES TO ENGAGE SPORT COMMUNITY IN FIGHT AGAINST AIDS

Lausanne, 1 June 2004 - The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in which both organisations agreed to combine their efforts to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, particularly among the sport community. The signing ceremony took place at the IOC Headquarters in Lausanne in the presence of IOC President Jacques Rogge and UNAIDS Executive Director Dr Peter Piot.

The main objectives of the MOU are to exchange regular information and lessons learned in order to enhance the role of sports organisations in the fight against AIDS at community and national levels, and to organize AIDS awareness activities with coaches, athletes and sports personalities.

As a first step, the IOC will produce and distribute an HIV/AIDS awareness card to the 11,000 athletes who will take part in the Games of the XXVIII Olympiad in Athens this summer.

“The world of sport is not separate from the rest of the world,” said IOC President Jacques Rogge, on signing the MOU. “Sport breaks down barriers, promotes self-esteem, and can teach life skills and healthy behaviour. Athletes can be an inspiration and role models for the youth of the world. This signature will allow the IOC and UNAIDS to build coordinated efforts in order to help combat HIV/AIDS.”

A few weeks from now, on 17-18 June, UNAIDS, the IOC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies will hold the Olympic Sport and HIV/AIDS workshop in Johannesburg. The event will gather experts and National Olympic Committees from twelve countries in sub-Saharan Africa to discuss how sport could help support national and international efforts to curb the spread of the AIDS epidemic, especially among young people.

“One third of the 40 million people living with HIV are young people under age 25, many of whom are involved in sports, either as spectators or as participants,” said Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “It is vitally important for young people to have access to information about HIV so that they can stay HIV-free and lead healthy and productive lives. The sports community is a key partner in reaching out to young men and women, whether in their village or town, or globally.”

Note to Editors:

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. More than 40 million people are infected with HIV worldwide. Recent statistics show that AIDS is having an increasing impact on women and girls and efforts to date have not been sufficient.

HIV (the human immunodeficiency virus) is a preventable disease that weakens the body's immune system. HIV can lead to AIDS, which stands for 'acquired immunodeficiency syndrome'. There is currently no cure for AIDS. Once someone is infected with HIV he or she is infected for life. As the disease progresses people can die from a range of infections caused by their weakened immune systems.

Medication can slow the progress of HIV infection but these drugs are expensive and not available to most people in the developing world. HIV is a slow-acting virus. Most infected individuals look healthy and feel well for many years after infection. Nearly 90% of all HIV-infected people worldwide do not know they have the virus, though they can transmit it to others.

UNAIDS is the leading global advocate in fighting AIDS. UNAIDS brings together nine UN system organizations, including the United Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank.

The IOC is an international non-governmental non-profit organisation and the creator and supreme authority of the Olympic Movement. Its role is to promote top-level sport as well as sport for all in accordance with the Olympic Charter. It ensures the regular celebration of the Olympic Games and strongly encourages, by appropriate means, the promotion of women in sport, that of sports ethics and the protection of athletes.

For more information please contact Emmanuelle Moreau, Communications Manager - Institutional Affairs, mobile: +41-79 637 30 17, e-mail: emu@olympic.org, Mark Dolley, Communications Manager - Olympic Games, mobile: +41 79 216 86 31, the IOC Communications Department, tel: +41 21 621 6111, or Dominique De Santis, UNAIDS, Geneva, tel. +41 22 791 4509, desantis@unaids.org. For more information about the IOC, visit www.olympic.org. For more information about UNAIDS, visit www.unaids.org.