

## **2018 Social Forum**



**Opening Remarks by  
Mr. A. L. Abdul Azeez,  
Chairperson-Rapporteur of the 2018 Social Forum**

**Geneva, 01 October 2018**

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to open the 2018 Social Forum of the Human Rights Council as its Chairperson-Rapporteur. I welcome you all to this event today. I am confident, that our discussion, in the next three days, on how the theme under focus can promote human rights, will make an important contribution towards the success of this Forum.

Over the years since its establishment, the Social Forum has served as an inclusive platform for multi-stakeholders. It has enabled a deep reflection, among participants, on important themes that could bring out diverse aspects of intersectionality between human rights and the society. These discourses have gone a long way in enriching deliberations and their outcomes in human rights and related fields.

Today, we live in a world which is globalised yet volatile. Every recognised norm and value on which the United Nations, the international order, and multilateralism stand, is being put to test. The importance of the Social Forum, in this context, as a bridge-builder and as an enabler of an exchange of diverse perspectives aimed to enhance and elaborate such norms and values, stands strengthened.

It is against this backdrop that I approach the 2018 Social Forum and its programme. As decided by the Human Rights Council in resolution A/HRC/RES/35/28, this Forum will address the possibilities of using Sport and the Olympic ideal to promote human rights for all and to strengthen universal respect for them. We are pleased that a very competent and diverse group of participants are here with us today. Some of them have travelled long distances, to make it to this Forum. Your presence and active contributions will help to broaden our understanding of how the theme for 2018 can promote human rights.

In 2007, the Council decided to preserve the Social Forum as “a unique space for interactive dialogue between the United Nations human rights machinery and various stakeholders, including grass-roots organizations”. That was with a view to addressing

“issues linked with the national and international environment needed for the promotion of the enjoyment of all human rights by all”. Over the years, an increasingly diverse array of stakeholders has been brought together to engage in innovative discussions on contemporary human rights issues in an open and participatory setting.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the next 3 days, we will address the key components of the overall theme. Following an overview of how sport and the Olympic ideal can promote human rights, we will consider sports, human solidarity and universal values for all humanity. We will discuss gender equality in sport. We will have an exchange of perspectives on inclusivity and non-discrimination. The rights to work will be discussed, as will the role of sports in relation to sustainable cities and the right to an adequate standard of living. Presentations, interactive dialogues and side events will add colour to the whole programme of the Forum.

We will also discuss the power of collective action for sharing the benefits of sports. Our deliberations will address sports for sustainable development and sustained peace, and sport in relation to youth, children and future generations. ‘The way forward’ will be discussed in terms of social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

On Wednesday afternoon, at the close of the Forum, with the help of my team and of the Secretariat, I hope to have a substantive set of clear ideas drawn from the three-day deliberations. Those recommendations would provide inputs to other mechanisms and processes debating the important relationship between Sport, the Olympic Ideal and Human Rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sports, like diplomacy, has the potential to bring together all actors or participants, beyond the immediate theatre of competition. They both encourage camaraderie and solidarity to achieve shared objectives. The ‘win-win’ in sport, as in diplomacy, is to

remain engaged, to build and maintain momentum, and to reach the finish line of pursuit.

The UN Charter and the UDHR, in their essence, represent the common aspirations of humanity- aspirations to a life of dignity, equality and freedom, and aspirations to a world of peace and prosperity. It calls upon all disciplines, including sport and diplomacy, to work together towards effectively and meaningfully realising these aspirations.

I mentioned earlier that today's world is globalized, yet volatile. Persons or groups professing hate or extremism not only make "the other" their target, but also the very institutions that help build peace, reconciliation and progress. This extends to ridiculing diplomacy or attempting to debase the role of diplomats and diplomatic institutions, and often sport and sportspersons.

An effective response to such hatred and extremism consists in sport and diplomacy working together, with other disciplines, to educate and advance human rights, mutual understanding and tolerance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of this year's Social Forum is of significance to the State and people of Sri Lanka. Sport, in Sri Lanka, is an important part of the country's culture. Sri Lankans generally have a passion for sport, whether it is for our national sports, or for the immensely popular sports such as cricket. Sri Lankans were particularly proud when the Sri Lankan Cricket Team won the World Twenty20 in 2014. We are also proud that Sri Lanka's National Team won the Asian Championship in Netball this year. Behind our celebration of victory remains the strength of diversity reflected in our teams, which has brought glory to the country.

I would invite you to see the last event in the programme of the Social Forum on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018. The UN Music Team will have a presentation which includes a World

Premiere “Racing for Peace”. That symbolises, in my view, Sri Lankans’ desire and commitment for lasting peace and advancement of human rights.

Promoting human rights through sports depends on multiple stakeholders for solutions. The Social Forum can play a valuable and dynamic role for change by engaging a broad range of stakeholders in open discussion. This includes Permanent Missions of States, other governmental representatives, athletes, sports governing bodies, trade unions, NGOs, academics, and indigenous groups, among others. Participants come from various corners of the world, from Colombia to Mongolia, from Finland to South Africa, from Kenya to Canada, from the Philippines to Brazil.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I ask of the participants to consider how, going forward, we can continue to strengthen and improve this Forum. That is required, to realize its potential as a space for a constructive dialogue between civil society, international organizations, States and other stakeholders. This platform must be put to full use, with governments playing an active role, alongside civil society and all others. The recommendations we make must contribute to making a difference. On my part, I assure you that I will do all I can, to ensure a constructive and action-oriented discussion and outcome of this Forum.

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