23rd Session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat
Nairobi 11-15 April 2001

Statement by Mr. Thomas A. Ganda Sithole, Representative of the Permanent Observer for the International Olympic Committee to the United Nations

Mr. President
The Executive Director of UN Habitat
Excellencies
Delegates

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) conveys its compliments to the distinguished Governing Council. It is an honor to appear before you today. I am here because the IOC is committed to using sport as a tool for development and peace, and to support the Millennium Development Goals.

With your kind permission, Mr. President, allow me to put those efforts in a larger context of the IOC’s long cooperation with the international community and the UN. The decision by the UN General Assembly in 2009 to give the IOC UN Observer status was the culmination of a relationship with roots that go back to the IOC’s work with the League of Nations.

Since 1993 through the Millennium Declaration of 2000, Member States of the United Nations have been acknowledging the important role that sport can play in addressing some of society’s problems, crime, violence, unemployment and settlement.

Mr. President,

It is a fact, as stated in the Executive Director’s Theme Document, that our cities are not only getting crowded, but that the more slums people build the more open spaces are occupied, taking away that important element, a human right no less, of affording young people in particular, opportunities to express themselves and develop through physical activities, sport and play.

The IOC’s founding principles, among which the main one is to place sport at the service of humankind, have not changed in 107 years. To that end, with UN-Habitat, we seek to contribute in our small way in the people’s pursuit of happiness, creating under difficult circumstances, a culture of healthy lifestyles.
We are more than aware, that sport on its own cannot make change. It can contribute to change. The President of this Governing Council can testify to the difference that sport has made in the pursuit of peace, human understanding and development through the Kagame Football Cup. The Executive Director, fresh from running the Metropolis of Barcelona, a city whose hosting of the Olympic Games was a game changer in terms of spurring infrastructural development, sustainable development understanding between peoples, is a living witness to what sport can bequeath a nation.

Mr. President

Let me conclude my statement thus:

Sports organizations the world over have long switched modes. No longer is sport just fun. It is sustainable development, housing, technology and provider livelihoods. In three weeks, the IOC will hold its 9th World Conference on Sport and Environment in Qatar at which both UN-Habitat and UNEP will be represented at senior levels.

The conference will take into consideration the Executive Director’s Theme Document to Doha to guide the world of sport into putting into greater context its responsibilities and how we may support you in your endeavors. The IOC has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with many UN agencies, funds and programmes. Among them, UN-Habitat. The idea is to extend your reach to the billions of young people that sport talks to in their daily lives and to the authorities and planners.

Mr. President

In a word, sport is therefore you. Sport can make a difference in your noble endeavors. It is a great tool in your able hands.

I thank you