**Panel discussion on protecting children from sale and sexual exploitation in the context of sports**

7 March 2019, 10:00 - 12:00

Conference Room XXV, Palais des Nations, Geneva

**UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material and the Centre for Sport and Human Rights**

On 7 March 2019, in the context of the 40th session of the UN Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children and the Centre for Sport and Human Rights organised a panel discussion on protecting children from sale and sexual exploitation in the context of sports.

* Mary Harvey, CEO, Centre for Sport and Human Rights

Ms Mary Harvey began by emphasising the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement, including sport bodies, States, NGOs, sponsors, broadcast agencies, etc. She spoke of the positive nature of sports in particular for children. It was fundamental for children to be able to participate in sports in a safe environment, but this was unfortunately not always the case. Ms Harvey underscored that sports were not immune to the abhorrent crime of sexual exploitation of children. As of today, structures of protection in sports are, in many cases, insufficient. It was vital to address the particular needs of children. She mentioned the strategic dialogue on remedy in the sport and human rights context, organised by the Centre for Sport and Human Rights that was held in The Hague last year. A core challenge was to ensure that States and other actors involved in sport implement protection measures for athletes, including youth athletes. Ms Harvey alluded to the very helpful recommendations from the report of the Special Rapporteur. It was important to create a collective action and a collective impact, and also to strengthen the access to effective remedies. To conclude, she explained that the Centre for Sport and Human Rights would incorporate child rights in all its activities and use them as guiding principles. Moreover, the Centre would endeavour to function as bridge between the various stakeholders and share relevant expertise.

* Gigi Alford, World Players Association UNI Global Union

Ms Gigi Alford remarked at the significant timing of the Special Rapporteur’s report, as it set the agenda for all parties involved. She explained the work of the World Players Association, including through the Sport and Rights Alliance, a global coalition of NGOs and trade unions that represents and advocates for the rights and interests of those most affected by sport, particularly athletes, children, and others. The Association is committed to ensuring the participation of all athletes and in particular child athletes. Ms Alford reviewed existing international standards that directly related to human rights and sports and outlined the several policies taken by major sport federations, such as the Commonwealth Games Federation, the International Netball Federation, FIFA, and UEFA, to respect human rights and protect children. She shared the recommendation that in order to adequately safeguard child athletes, sport governing bodies must commit both to international standards of child protection and to respecting the internationally-recognised rights of all athletes. Ms Alford underscored the need for more data on the rights experiences of child athletes and described World Players Association’s project with Loughborough University to pilot the Census of Athletes Rights Experiences (CARE), a survey focused on childhood experiences in organised sport of professional athletes affiliated with the player union movement. She closed her presentation by reiterating that a key reason for lack of protections for young athletes is the denial of their identity as children, but they should be recognised as children first, athletes second.

* Elda Moreno, Head of the Children’s Rights and Sport Values Department, Council of Europe

Ms Elda Moreno started by recalling that ending sexual abuse and exploitation of children is a journey from denial to coordinated and effective action. The Council of Europe Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse is helping 44 States to advance in this journey. Ms Moreno underlined that in 70-80% of cases of sexual abuse and exploitation, children know their aggressor. This made it particularly hard for children to talk about their experience and report abuse. In certain cases child victims were so young that they were not even able to recognise the abuse. Ms Moreno stressed the specific elements that made children vulnerable in sport, including the imbalanced power relations between coaches and athletes, a male-dominated environment, tolerance for physical violence, discrimination and inappropriate behaviour, scandal avoidance, the importance of rewards and the multiple risks situations such as showers, carpooling and overnights outside home. Feelings of fear, shame, guilt, confusion, powerlessness and ignorance make it particularly hard for children to speak up and report abuse. She emphasised that it was not up to children to break the silence, but up to adults to prevent abuse and create the conditions so that children can safely report. Ms Moreno also referred to available guidance to develop safeguarding policies and codes of conducts, to train professionals and to empower parents and children. A Council of Europe-EU joint project allowed for the preparation of very useful tools elaborated with the help of governmental experts, survivors, sport organisations, child protection agencies and researchers.

* Patrick Gasser, UEFA.

Mr Patrick Gasser presented the UEFA Child Safeguarding Project. Brief overview of UEFA social responsibility strategy. The Child Safeguarding Project was part of the wider corporate social responsibility efforts by UEFA. Mr Gasser then showed the link between UEFA’s work and the SDGs. Regarding children, the president of UEFA had underlined the importance of providing a safe environment to play football. In order to guide its work on child safeguarding, UEFA had launched a tender to identify a partnering expert organisation, which had led to the choice of Terre des Hommes. UEFA had recognised the need to tackle issue of child safeguarding in the world of European football. Mr Gasser concluded by presenting an event in Frankfurt targeting all 55 member associations to build their capacity on child safeguarding.

The presentations were subsequently followed by a question and answer session. A representative from the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC) intervened followed by the European Union and Terre des Hommes International. The role of private actors such as clubs and agents was raised. The creation of a safe environment for child participation was also discussed. The panellists responded and firstly underlined the importance of the implementation of existing regulations and standards. They also emphasised the importance of dealing with the environment in sports that enabled sexual abuse and exploitation to occur. Clear and non-negotiable redlines needed to be set. In addition, the panellists discussed the complexities of enabling child participation in particular at the international level.

Another round of interventions was made by FIFA, the ILO and Australia. The issue of lack of data was raised. The question of evolving sports and the increased privatisation of certain federations was also discussed. The panellists responded that several measures had to be taken to ensure mandatory reporting and the creation of independent complaint mechanisms. They also raised the abuse suffered by referees in sports.

Finally, Greece took the floor followed by the IOC and Mission 89. The issue of terminology and the need to have simplified language outside of the human rights world was discussed. The question of trafficking was also brought forward. In response, the panellists agreed on the importance of translate the core human rights messages into language that could be understood by different constituencies. The Special Rapporteur took this opportunity to reiterate the importance of uniform and systematic terminology and recalled the existence of [Terminology guidelines](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Children/SR/TerminologyGuidelines_en.pdf) for the protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

To conclude, the panellists thanked the audience for its attendance and active engagement. The Centre for Sport and Human Rights underscored its willingness to engage with all the different stakeholders that had intervened and aimed to play a central role. The Special Rapporteur repeated her continued involvement on this subject and hoped to organise a further event that could include most sport federations, in Lausanne.