UN-Habitat and the Olympic movement getting sporty in the cities

New York 20 September 2023--UN-Habitat and the International Olympic Committee have launched a collaboration that harnesses sport and active recreation as an accelerator of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in cities.

Meeting on the sidelines of the SDG Summit currently underway in New York, UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimuna Mohd Sharif and the International Olympic Committee President Thoman Bach penned the agreement aimed at making sports a key component of urbanization.

From promoting good health and wellbeing (SDG 3), to promoting gender equality (SDG 5) as the forthcoming Paris Olympics promises to be the first gender equal games, to reducing inequalities (SDG 10) and tackling racial prejudice, promoting sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), effectively addressing climate change (SDG 13) and reducing crime (SDG 16), sport has an undeniable role in advancing the SDGs.

The intentional deployment of sport to drive sustainable development is captured in the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) strategy "Olympism365," while the role of cities and urbanisation to drive sustainable development is captured in the New Urban Agenda. This collaboration uniquely combines these frameworks and is anchored in UN-Habitat's SDG Cities Initiative.

SDG Cities (www.sdg-cities.com) promotes a systematic approach to advance the SDGs in cities and provides cities with digital tools and technical support in areas of data analysis, strategic planning, institutional effectiveness and investment in impact. The collaboration will support the active role of sport communities in this process. This will include community-based mapping of sport and active recreation amenities and identifying gaps, integrating sport into strategic plans and municipal functions and mobilising investment for sports amenities and programmes that promote Olympism 365, and that leave no one and no place behind.

The collaboration will result in cities that will thrive as hubs where sports, physical activity and active recreation catalyse improved health, reduced gender and social inequality, environmental sustainability, and peace - ultimately enhancing the quality of life for urban residents.

During the Local2030 event at the SDG Action Weekend President Bach had emphasised the importance of putting sport at the service of society. He stated, "We know that we have to bring the benefits of sport to where the people are – this means in the cities and urban areas of our world. We are honoured to be signing a new partnership with UN-Habitat to support SDG 11, to make cities more resilient and sustainable. With our Olympism365 strategy, the IOC addresses several of the SDGs at the same time: health, social inclusion, education, gender equality and many more. Sport has great social significance; it is a glue that bonds communities together."

On her part, the UN-Habitat Executive Director shared her personal passion for sport and her experience as an athlete in her youth; she also commented on the power of sport to bring people together and contribute to urban culture. She thanked Thomas Bach the IOC president for this

collaboration, “With just seven years left to get the SDGs done, we must shift gear from walking pace to a sprint. The SDGs are for everyone and needs everyone. All stakeholders must join the race. The collaboration will not only demonstrate the importance of sport as accelerator of sustainable development in cities, but will also demonstrate how impact is accelerated when all of society engages.”

IOC President further elaborated on the role sport plays to promote mental and physical health, reflecting on how daily exercise had helped people survive the COVID pandemic. He shared his enthusiasm for the collaboration, telling the Executive Director, “This is a win-win – you help us bring sport to people in cities, and we help you promote SDGs in cities through sport... a city without sport will never be an SDG City.”

The collaboration will commence with five pilot cities in Africa, Latin America and Asia Pacific, where lessons learnt will be applied at a greater scale. More information on the initiative can be found on www.sdg-cities.com and by reaching out to: Dyfed Aubrey: SDG Cities Global Lead dyfed.aubrey@un.org, and Ollie Dudfield: Associate Director, Olympism 365 ollie.dudfield@olympic.org.