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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[01 February 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Participation in sport under article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

According to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations: “The unique ability of sports to transcend linguistic, cultural and social barriers makes it an excellent platform for strategies of inclusion and adaptation. Furthermore, the universal popularity of sport and its physical, social and economic development benefits make it an ideal tool for fostering the inclusion and well-being of persons with disabilities.”¹

Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23) is globally committed to the promotion and full recognition of the dignity of people with disabilities and of their essential role in building a new humanity and a new society. APG23 is engaged in different activities that promote inclusion at different levels, including recreational, leisure and sports activities.

Besides fundamental issues related to social inclusion and the fight against discrimination and stigma some of our programs involving sport and disabilities, adopt also actions aimed at reducing the percentage of the sedentary population, promoting sports practices carried out outdoors for an "eco-sustainable" culture of sport and encouraging the integration process between sports and school systems. Some of the projects include a high level of innovation and creativity to better facilitate integration/inclusion through the practice of sports such as wave surfing and athletics that stimulate relationships, collaboration, and autonomous management of the cognitive-motor process in children with disabilities.

Since 1993, the Amateur Sports Association (ASD) AG23 in Santarcangelo di Romagna (Italy), linked to APG23 and sharing the same objectives and purposes, is operating to create an enabling environment for relationships and growth dedicated to children and young people, with or without disabilities.

The project has as main background sport (that like playing) is an excellent tool for guiding children, teenagers, and adults to discover themselves, their bodies, to get to know each other and the near and distant space. Moreover, physical activity is essential for children and young people with disabilities, who participate in various activities with their skills and enthusiasm. For many children with disabilities there is a considerable risk of social marginalization since the meeting spots are linked to competitive sports practices and not adapted ones.

Among other activities, the project aims at favouring the participation in sports of boys and girls with disabilities through the creation of an athletics team. The team trains twice a week and during the year takes part in sporting events at local and national level with the Special Olympics. These activities allow children, among other things, to feel part of a team, a group of friends, to respect the role of the instructor and to become autonomous in carrying out a task. During the school year, a project on inclusive sport is also proposed, involving the classes and schools that the members of the team attend: in fact, at this age, classrooms are the second fundamental place of relationship for adolescents, where the comparison and exchange between peers take place. The project also contemplates the involvement of families of children with disabilities in the activities, through participation in team events and support during competitions. Families are called to actively participate with cheering, group outings and, where possible, personal involvement alongside the child.

Wheelchair Basket Forlì (Italy) founded in 2007 by APG23, is a basketball team for people with disabilities on wheelchairs, with the belief that basketball, and sport more generally, have a highly educational, relational, and playful-recreational value. One of the people involved in this field explains: "It happens very often that people forced to stay in a wheelchair, especially due to traumatic events, lose the motivation for social life and end up

¹ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/issues/disability-and-sports.html#:~:text=Sport%20changes%20the%20person%20with,act%20as%20agents%20of%20change.>

staying close at home, without any kind of interest and relationships. Sport allows everyone to fit into the social fabric as equals, and in particular these athletes have managed to show great constancy and great value. They have a lot to teach us all".

Another experience is the one from ASD SPORT SENZA BARRIERE / APG23-ONLUS in Fossano (Cuneo - Italy). Its purpose is to develop and disseminate several sports activities, through the management of competitive and non-competitive, recreational, and rehabilitative moments, with physical activities favouring an integral development of the human person, considering the psychological, physical, and spiritual dimensions.

As part of its objectives, the association also has social educational and inclusion purposes for persons with disabilities and every other person in a situation of social marginalization or poverty (i.e., foreigners, refugees, people in situations of social exclusion) and for example in cases in which financial hardships do not allow practicing of a sport.

The sports tournament "Don Oreste Benzi" (name of the founder of APG23) started in 2012 as an event to give young people with disabilities the opportunity to experience a competitive event, to give visibility and concreteness to the training activity carried out during the year by young people with disabilities.

All over the world, people with disabilities are still subject to discrimination and stigma. Sport can play an important role in inclusion processes at different levels, in society, in school, in the workplace. Promoting inclusive sporting activity means promoting a tool with a great potential to favour social integration and aggregation actions between people with or without disabilities for the benefit of the whole society.

Pope Francis in his address to a delegation from the "Special Olympics World Winter Games 2017" stated: "Sport also helps us to spread a culture of encounter and solidarity. Together, athletes and helpers show us that there are no obstacles or barriers which cannot be overcome. You are a sign of hope for all who commit themselves to a more inclusive society. Every life is precious, every person is a gift and inclusion enriches every community and society. This is your message for the world, for a world without borders, which excludes no one."²

Sadly, according to the World Health Organization: "The covid-19 pandemic exposed people with disabilities to three increased risks with devastating consequences – the risks of contracting COVID-19, developing severe symptoms of COVID-19 or dying from the disease, as well as having poorer health during and after the outbreak, whether or not they were infected with COVID-19."³

APG23 strongly believes in the importance of inclusive sports activities both for the lives of people with disabilities and for the whole society at large, and especially in this moment in which, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, people with disabilities are so hardly hit by the disease, isolated by the measures to contain it and, most probably, impoverished in the aftermath of the outbreak. It is important that they are at the heart of the "building back better" plans with their full participation in order to give in those plans proper consideration to every aspect of their life, including sports.

² http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/february/documents/papa-francesco_20170216_special-olympics-international.html.

³ <https://www.who.int/news-room/facts-in-pictures/detail/disabilities>.