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**75<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's  
Programme**

**October 2024**

**Statement by the International Olympic Committee**

- Chair, High Commissioner, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates
- The International Olympic Committee (IOC) commends the tireless work and commitment of UNHCR staff who, in increasingly challenging contexts, continue, relentlessly to deliver protection and humanitarian assistance to an unprecedented number of forcibly displaced people around the globe.
- We also mourn the loss of life among the courageous UNHCR staff and humanitarian workers.
- The Olympic Laurel awarded to High Commissioner Grandi on the occasion of the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games in Paris this summer acknowledges all of you, your sacrifice and commitment. Thank you.
- The International Olympic Committee has been proud to work alongside UNHCR for many years highlighting the unique ability of sport to bring people together, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or religion, offering a platform for shared human experiences.
- The strength of this partnership was particularly visible this summer with the success of the Third IOC Refugee Olympic team competing



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at the Olympic Games. In addition to competing, and showcasing their talents, the IOC Refugee Olympic Team stands as a powerful symbol of resilience, hope, and the transformative power of sport for those forced to flee.

- The IOC and UNHCR share a vision of a more peaceful, inclusive world where no one is left behind. We will continue, through sport, to advocate for peace, understanding, and dignity for all.
- But this is against a backdrop of ever-increasing fragility. Recent figures indicate that nearly 1 in 69 people on the planet are now displaced; with hundreds of thousands more in the last few weeks. The needs are great, and while sport alone cannot address these challenges, it can play a valuable and complimentary role contributing to our shared outcomes. This is a role that the IOC, through the Olympic Refugee Foundation, is committed to strengthening.
- One example is from the field of mental health and well-being. As we gather here today, we note that World Mental Health Day was recently marked on October 10<sup>th</sup>
- It is estimated that 1 in 5 people living in a displacement experience a mental health issue such as depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder, with many more likely to experience some level of psychosocial distress.
- In low and middle income countries, where the vast majority of displaced people reside, 9/10 people cannot access the mental health services they need.



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- In Uganda, the Olympic Refugee Foundation's Game Connect programme has shown that sport, when used intentionally, can significantly reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression among displaced people and their host communities peers.
- In Europe, we are working in partnership with National Olympic Committees and local Red Cross National Societies, to scale Sport Coach +, a foundational skills training in trauma-informed coaching practice and psychosocial support, aimed at fostering safe and supportive sport environments to promote the mental health and well-being of young people affected by displacement, through the sport system.
- But despite the evidence communities impacted by displacement are all too often missing out on the benefits that sport can bring as it is not incorporated systematically into refugee responses.
- We are committed to sharing our learning, supporting other organizations, policy makers and practitioners to adapt and scale these approaches to meet the unique needs of their local communities.
- And we are not just working bilaterally, to contribute to sustainable change, we are committed to working collectively as part of multi-stakeholder partnerships to scale and innovate the way sport is utilized in support of displaced people and their communities.



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- This was evident in the lead up to the Global Refugee Forum December 2023 and in commitments in support of the Multistakeholder Pledge on Sport for Inclusion and Protection, which galvanised partners across the Olympic Movement to come together in supporting displaced people and their host communities, through sport.
- As a co-convener of the Sport for Refugees Coalition and the Sport Pledge, alongside the Sport Foundation and UNHCR, we are proud to share that over 140 entities – from the world of sport, to refugee led organisations, to humanitarian actors, to Member States and the private sector, have made commitments to the Pledge. We know that when we work together, we can achieve more..
- That’s why today, I want to encourage each of you—whether you represent Member States, humanitarian organizations, cities, refugee and community-led groups, or other key stakeholders—to explore how sport can be leveraged to improve the mental health and well-being, the protection and inclusion of displaced communities worldwide.
- Thank you