

*UN Global Programme on Security of Major Sporting Events, and
Promotion of Sport & its Values as a Tool to Prevent Violent Extremism*

Role of Youth in Preventing Violent Extremism through Sport

*2023 Counter-Terrorism Week Side Event
23 June 2023, 8:00am EDT, UNHQ Conference Room 9*

Remarks by the Director of UNICRI

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues,

It is an honour to welcome you to this side event on behalf of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) to celebrate the power of youth in preventing violent extremism through sport.

We hope today's event will ignite a dynamic conversation about the pivotal role of young leaders to contribute to a better world through sports-based interventions. UNICRI works with youth as key partners – in sports and beyond – because we recognize their unique role to promote peace and security and to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism in their communities.

Please allow me to express my sincere gratitude to our partners, the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, the UN Alliance of Civilizations, and the International Center for Sports Security, whose support and collaboration have been instrumental to the Global Sports Programme's success. Thank you to UNOCT and UNAOC for organizing this important side event. UNICRI appreciates our close and valued partnership, and we look forward to our continued fruitful collaboration.

I would also like to thank our esteemed panel members for their active engagement and invaluable insights. Their diverse expertise, knowledge, and experience exemplify the transformative power of sport.

When we consider the activities and projects of the Global Sports Programme, it is evident that sport possesses an unparalleled ability to foster a sense of community, resilience, and unity. Nowhere is this impact more critical than in the lives of our young people, who often face poverty and marginalization and may become susceptible to divisive narratives from extremist groups. Yet youth also bring promise, with their boundless energy, vitality, and passion to shape a better tomorrow. Empowering youth through sport gives them a positive outlet for their enthusiasm and provides them with opportunities to cultivate leadership skills, benefit from mentorship, and build connections across diverse backgrounds and experiences.

As a partner of the Global Sports Programme, UNICRI is working closely with ten different civil society organizations around the world, selected through the Programme's grant initiative to implement sports-based initiatives to prevent violent extremism (PVE), with focus on youth as primary beneficiaries.

We have witnessed the profound impact of these collaborations with youth. Their experiences have highlighted both the significance and challenges of involving women and minority groups, the pivotal role of well-trained coaches in fostering positive interactions across groups prone to conflict, and the indispensable contribution of local civil society organizations. Local CSOs possess vital community knowledge and expertise needed to ensure that sports projects are culturally relevant and tailored to the unique needs of the young people they serve in their communities.

Our work with local CSOs also underscores the pressing need for leaders to genuinely listen to the voices and perspectives of youth. I hope that

today's panel discussion will contribute to elevating young people's voices. Youth involvement in shaping policies for the present and future is not merely symbolic, but rather necessary for sustainable and effective solutions across peace and development contexts. We call on all decision-makers to listen, value, and consider the first-hand insights of our youth.

As a research and training institute focused on criminal justice and crime prevention, UNICRI's action-oriented research and project implementation generate important evidence and data to evaluate the effectiveness of sport to prevent violent extremism. We seek to deepen our collective understanding of effective prevention strategies and to continuously enhance how we leverage sport to positively influence lives across borders, generations, and diverse communities. And we share good practices and concrete examples of how to integrate sports to prevent and combat violent extremism. It is only through this continuous focus on learning, data, analysis, and evaluation that we can ensure sport is maximally effective in nurturing social cohesion and deterring violent extremism.

By supporting sports initiatives, and more importantly investing time *and resources* in youth initiatives, we can create fertile ground for young leaders to thrive and make a lasting impact in their communities. This side event is a powerful reflection of UNICRI and all the Global Sports Programme partners' commitment to the transformative power of sport for positive change, particularly as harnessed by our young people.

Thank you, and I wish you a fruitful discussion with our excellent panel.