



Delivered to:

2017 Sporting Chance Forum on Thursday 30th November in Geneva, Switzerland, at the International Conference Centre of Geneva.

The Role of NHRIs in supporting Hosts of Mega-Sporting Events
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'The role that sport can play in realising human rights is self-evident. A global platform with local relevance, that operates across the private, public and non-government sectors. It is an area of everyday life that brings people together in a positive affirmation of our common humanity. This vision of sport is a vision equally articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

When I am asked to identify opportunities for human rights associated with hosting a large sports event, my eyes widen. The possibilities are, in truth, only limited by the resources made available - and those resources are typically significant.

Belfast in Northern Ireland has successfully bid to host the 2021 Commonwealth Youth Games. With this success comes the prospect of showcasing a sports event for children and young people, designed and delivered through their active involvement. It is an opportunity to demonstrate the right to participate to its fullest extent as enshrined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This will of course have a particular meaning in society emerging from a history of violent conflict.

There is infinite potential and, to be frank, the challenge in Belfast is not to get the hosts to engage with human rights, but rather to temper

expectations. The organisers need to focus on the question of what meaningful human rights outcomes can be delivered. This is where I believe the expertise of a National Human Rights Institution can prove invaluable.

In Belfast, the Commonwealth Games Council of Northern Ireland (CGCNI) has built an early and strong relationship with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC). The aim of the NIHRC is to provide assistance to the CGCNI to ensure due diligence in both the design and delivery of the Games. This will be in accordance with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights operating within the framework of respect, protect and remedy. Indeed, it places the Games at the centre of a wider area of work which the NIHRC has driven forward within the private sector in Northern Ireland, which considers issues such as ethical procurement practices, tackling modern day slavery and promoting gender equality - with the participation of both multi-national companies and small and medium enterprises.

The importance of the relationship between the CGCNI and the NIHRC cannot, in my opinion, be overstated, since it will provide the Belfast Games with an endorsement from an organisation that retains A status for its compliance with the United Nations Paris Principles. The practical effect is to add a level of domestic accountability and human rights expertise that I would suggest has not always be so evident in many large sports events.

At the same time, the mandate of Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to promote human rights is providing a basis for the Games Council to explore how Belfast 2021 can be marketed and utilised to help build a culture of rights within wider society.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is not alone, however, in its aim to build such a strategic partnership. The Australian Human Rights Commission is doing likewise in advance of the Gold Coast Games in 2018. Together with the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, momentum is being created towards taking the agenda of sports and human rights to the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) here in Geneva.

There are 117 bodies accredited by GANHRI, 73 of which have A status. This status means that the institutions concerned have the necessary enforcement powers amongst other responsibilities to challenge non-compliance with human rights standards within their jurisdictions, including of those involved in sport.

Our collective aim is to highlight the opportunities and present good practice examples and to encourage others to do likewise.

No serious endeavour to protect and promote human rights should take place without considering the important role that the domestic guardians

of human rights can and ought to play. Those guardians as mandated by the United Nations are National Human Rights Institutions. A future Centre for Sport and Human Rights could have as one of its central tasks the objective of introducing global and domestic sports bodies to their counterpart National Human Rights Institutions.

A centre for Sport and Human Rights has the potential to act as a hub from which global, regional and domestic relationships could be forged. It could draw upon the expertise of National Human Rights Institutions and provide an educative platform between two sets of organisations that rarely engaged with each other but have some much in common.