

PRESS RELEASE

In the Birthplace of the Olympics, Special Olympics and UNICEF Join Efforts to Fight Marginalization of Children with Disabilities

ATHENS, 27 JUNE, 2011 – Against the backdrop of Special Olympics World Summer Games in Athens, Special Olympics and UNICEF today signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen their joint commitment to uphold the rights, dignity and inclusion of children with disabilities.

At a special ceremony, Dr. Timothy P. Shriver, Chairman and CEO of Special Olympics, and UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake pledged to deepen their partnership, working more closely together to combat the legal, social and physical barriers that exclude children with disabilities from full participation.

“Children with disabilities have the same hopes and dreams as all children, and the same right to make the most of their potential,” said Anthony Lake, UNICEF’s Executive Director. “The denial of that right is a loss, not only for those children, but for our societies. And it is unconscionable. By strengthening the partnership between Special Olympics and UNICEF, we will help to protect this right for more children with disabilities, and in so doing, enable them to contribute even more to their communities and countries.”

Children with disabilities are frequently the targets of discrimination and neglect, and denied essential services such as basic healthcare, education and other social welfare provisions. Negative societal attitudes also expose children with disabilities to greater risk of violence, abuse and exploitation. Tackling the discrimination that keeps children with disabilities on the margins of society is critical to including them as equal and active members of their communities.

Since 2007 UNICEF and Special Olympics have worked together to raise awareness of the abilities and rights of children with intellectual disabilities, change perceptions and challenge negative attitudes. Together, the two organizations promote the participation and empowerment of children with intellectual disabilities and their families worldwide, and seek to build their self-reliance, confidence and advocacy skills through sport programming, and related health and social services.

“We are honored to welcome UNICEF to join us here in Athens at our World Games and with us to issue this critical call to action for inclusion,” said Dr. Timothy P. Shriver, Chairman and CEO of Special Olympics. “As these athletes take the world stage, this is the perfect time to expand the partnership between Special Olympics and UNICEF, redoubling our efforts to achieve even greater results for our athletes and their families, and for all children with disabilities.”

In recent years, UNICEF and Special Olympics have worked together to establish the first Family Support Networks for families with children with intellectual disabilities in Cambodia; to provide opportunities for children in Jamaica to participate in Young Athletes programmes; and to provide health screenings, counseling on nutrition, and family health education in several locations throughout Kazakhstan.

Currently working together in 15 countries, including Greece, UNICEF and Special Olympics will work to expand the geographical reach of their collaborative efforts. One top priority is to encourage governments to ratify and implement the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the first human rights treaty of the 21st century and the first legally

binding instrument with comprehensive protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, including children. Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006, by May, 2011 100 countries had already ratified the Convention.

The partnership will also aim to integrate children and young people with disabilities into mainstream society. Toward this end, UNICEF is supporting the Global Youth Activation Summit, which is being held in Athens concurrently with Special Olympics World Summer Games. Organized by Special Olympics, the Summit brings together young people both with and without disabilities, from 30 countries. With a special focus on fostering inclusion and diversity, the Global Youth Summit pairs these young leaders to develop strategies designed to change people's perceptions about disability and to challenge negative attitudes.

"To me, attending the Global Youth Activation Summit is a great opportunity to know what Special Olympics athletes are experiencing all around the world. I believe grouping all our ideas is the best way to come up with solutions in order to understand the athletes and one another," said Wai Tsun "Hazel" Law, a 15-year-old participant from Hong Kong. "Then, we can bring these back to school so that we can take the lead together and spread the messages of respect and acceptance to the whole community."

About Special Olympics

Special Olympics is an international organization that changes lives through the power of sport by encouraging and empowering people with intellectual disabilities, promoting acceptance for all, and fostering communities of understanding and respect worldwide. Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the Special Olympics movement has grown from a few hundred athletes to more than 3.7 million athletes in over 170 countries in all regions of the world, providing year-round sports training, athletic competition and other related programs. Special Olympics now takes place every day, changing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities in places like China and from regions like the Middle East to the community playgrounds and ball fields in every small neighborhood's backyard. Special Olympics provides people with intellectual disabilities continuing opportunities to realize their potential, develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, and experience joy and friendship. Visit Special Olympics at www.specialolympics.org. Engage with us on: [Twitter @specialolympics](https://twitter.com/specialolympics); fb.com/specialolympics; youtube.com/specialolympicshq, and specialolympicsblog.wordpress.com.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: www.unicef.org

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