Thank you for that introduction and good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

It’s a great honor to be here today and to participate in such an important event. It’s truly wonderful to see representatives from so many countries here, and this, in itself, is a great demonstration of the collective willpower to promote the inter-dependence of the Global North and South.

I would like to thank the co-secretariat of the EU/ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly, and its co-presidents, Mrs. Glennys Kinnock and Mr. Wilke Rasmussen for their leadership in recognizing the important development potential of sport.

Let me just put into context why I am here to speak to you today.

As you heard, my name is Johann Olav Koss and I am CEO of Right To Play. Right To Play is an international humanitarian organization that uses sport and play programs to improve health, life skills, and foster peace for children and communities in the most disadvantaged areas of the world.

Right To Play works in both the humanitarian and development context, by training volunteers as coaches to deliver our programs in more than 23 countries affected by war, poverty and disease in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

In reference to this morning’s discussion about the situation in Chad, I would like to share with you that we have been working with the refugees from Darfur in Eastern Chad since 2006 reaching out to over 9,000 children, both from the refugee and host communities with regular sport and play activities.

In short: Our **Vision** is to create a healthier and safer world through the **power** of sport and play.
• But this is not where my passion and dedication to sport began.

• My story begins in Norway, where as a child, I loved to skate.

• It was thanks to the Government of Norway, that the infrastructure was there to allow me to skate. The Government ensured that there were facilities and a stadium where all children could skate free of charge and have fun.

• In addition, physical education was part of the Norwegian school curriculum, which provided me, and all of my classmates, the opportunity to participate in regular, supervised activity (up to three times a week) in a safe and encouraging environment.

• The community sports clubs where I initially trained as well as the training camps that I used later in my development were all put in place by the Government as part of its commitment to ensure wide access to sport for its citizens.

• Later, when I realized that I could skate relatively fast, I had free access to a qualified coach. This coach was trained by the Federation which of course was supported by the government, and he inspired and motivated me.

• The research and modern technology that the Sport Federations in Norway are doing (and that the Government invested in), allowed me to skate injury-free and focus on my training.

• And then came the Olympics. In 1994, I competed during the Lillehammer Olympics and I was able to do it in a beautiful modern sporting facility, which is now accessible to all, which you can guess - was funded by the Government.

• So – my mom and dad provided me with some good genes; my grandmother inspired me to believe that I could do anything I wanted to; the dedication and commitment were my own; my coach guided me in the right direction and team-members pushed me and supported me, but the government provided me, and many others, with an enabling environment to play and engage in sport.

• Through my personal experience, I have had the privilege to experience first-hand the power of sport in my own growth and development.

• We all know that this is the life of a privileged few and usually these privileged few are in developed countries.
• Through my work with Right To Play, I have had the chance to see first hand the power that sport and play initiatives can have in the most disadvantaged communities.

• Everywhere Right To Play engages with children and communities, I have witnessed the tremendous impact that sport and play can have – to reach people, to connect them to each other, and to communicate important information and truths – in a way that resonates and takes hold.

• All Right To Play projects are based on the inherent values of sport, such as teamwork and fair play, and they recognize that welfare of all their participants, especially children, is paramount.

• So let me speak a bit about what we mean by “Sport for Development and Peace”.

• In a development context, we define sport as all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction, such as play, recreation, organized or competitive sport, and indigenous sports and games.

• Over the past decade, UN agencies, international sport federations, international non-governmental organizations like Right To Play and grassroots organizations have been using sport as a tool for development and peace.

• Sport for Development and Peace has evolved over the past 10 years out of the growing recognition that sport is a simple and effective means of achieving development objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals.

• For example, at Right To Play, we have seen how sport serves as an effective tool to combat poverty by reducing the risk of diseases that intensify poverty. We know that sport can reduce stigma and increase self-esteem, and improve social skills, leading to increased employment and lower levels of poverty and hunger.

• We have also witnessed the potential of sport to help achieve the goal of universal primary education by helping to keep children in schools and enhance school attendance and academic achievements.

• Based on the key values of sport and specialized designed play programs (participation, teamwork, fairness and respect for your opponent), Right To Play programs in the field help promote gender equality and empower women by improving girls’ health and enhancing their self-confidence, as well as building their capacities as leaders.
• And finally, we have seen how sport can help **combat HIV and AIDS** by improving education and access to health information, and through its inclusive nature, it helps reduce HIV and AIDS-related stigma and discrimination.

• **So, you ask what National Governments can do and what role can they play?**

• I’m glad you asked, because it’s not just an important role: it’s the **most critical role**. Let me explain.

• Despite the numerous Sport for Development efforts underway by us and other NGOs, sports federations, the United Nations and a variety of other partners and stakeholders – ultimately, only national governments can ensure that every child has the right to play.

• It is up to national governments to set development priorities and provide the enabling environment and funding for Sport for Development and Peace initiatives.

• **One of the ways in which national governments can participate and contribute to Sport for Development and Peace is to adopt programs and policies that utilize the development potential of sport.**

• **They can also become involved in the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (SDP IWG).**

• Right To Play is the Secretariat to the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group, formed in 2004, which aims to empower governments with practical policy recommendations so that they may incorporate sport into national programs and policies.

• What began as a Working Group of four governments is now a group that represents 52 national governments, UN agencies and civil society. We are proud of this achievement, our strength in numbers and the growing support for the initiative.

• But don’t worry; there is always room for more.

• The Working Group was conceived from the 2003 United Nations Task Force on Sport for Development which published a ground-breaking report on the use of sport within the UN system. The report concluded that government involvement in, and ownership of, Sport for Development was crucial for success.

• After four years together, the Working Groups’ policy recommendations will be tabled in a comprehensive report entitled: “Harnessing the
Power of Sport for Development and Peace: Advice to Governments”.

- The Report will be presented on August 7, 2008, the day before the Opening Ceremonies to the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games, to Ministers who will discuss the final Report and its recommendations.

- This meeting will be followed by an official launch co-hosted by the Government of Canada.

- I encourage you to ask your respective Ministers attending the Games to attend this important meeting and, in doing so, contribute to the momentum that we need to collectively move our agenda for Sport for Development and Peace forward.

- Specifically for the EU Member States and for ACP Countries, the report provides a comprehensive set of policy recommendations on using sport as a tool for development: from mobilizing action within the government, to program and policy design and implementation.

- The recommendations directly advise governments to invest in, and work with, other governments and stakeholders to develop mechanisms for collaborative Sport for Development and Peace research and knowledge exchange.

- I would like to applaud the European Commission for being a significant partner in the global efforts to advance sport for development. As you know, the EU has begun introducing sport into its broader development strategies. In 2006, the EU Parliament adopted a Resolution on Development and Sport\(^1\), and in 2007 the Commission worked on the EU White Paper on Sport.

- Within many ACP countries, there is a strong recognition of sport’s development potential. Furthermore, countries from the ACP region are very active in the work of Sport for Development and Peace with Papua New Guinea and Palau joining the SDP IWG meeting in December 2007 and contributing their experiences to the Accra Call for Action on Sport for Development and Peace.

- These leadership efforts at the policy level help national governments of the North and South maximize the development potential of sport, and ensure that everyone has access to sport and play.

- As you know, resolutions and declarations mean little without proper investment, commitment and follow up. I urge you as members of the national and regional Parliaments to champion Sport for Development and Peace in your countries and help ensure that

\(^1\) EU Resolution on Sport and Development, adopted November 25, 2005, No. B6-0633/2005
the leadership efforts of your countries and regions are supported by sufficient budget allocations.

- I would further encourage you to ensure that national and regional policies are supported by comprehensive and community-centered programs, as we know that these work best.

In conclusion:

- For Sport for Development and Peace to continue to gain momentum and acceptance on government agendas, we must continue to learn from each other and build on our successes and best practices. We all need to work together: Governments, NGOs, the UN, sports federations, and advocates.

- By showing our commitment at a multilateral level to Sport for Development and Peace we hope to encourage national governments to seize the opportunity to incorporate Sport for Development and Peace into national agendas for the benefit of their nation's children.

- That's what I call teamwork – and it's one of the best values of sport. And this is exactly what we need now if we want Sport for Development initiatives to be long-term and sustainable.

- It is my sincere hope that we can all contribute in some small way to the success of this important effort, because we all know that when children play, the world wins.

- Thank you very much.

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