



## Sport Builds Bridges Between Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo

*On 16 October the very first "Friendship Games" took place in the Great Lakes region of Africa: a day of trans-border sports competitions to promote peace and unite young people from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) around the values of friendship and fraternity offered by sport.*

500 young people from 9-15 years old from communities located on both sides of the border participated in this first edition of the Games held in Rugombo in the Burundian province of Cibitoke, bordering the DRC.

Through the universal values of tolerance, respect and honesty conveyed by sport, this symbolic event demonstrated to youngsters from Burundi and the DRC that they can understand each other, communicate and coexist peacefully. A key message to build the foundations for sustainable peace between two countries that have suffered decades of ethnic tension related to violent gangs and the forced displacement of populations.

The Friendship Games were supported by Burundi's Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, the Burundian Olympic Committee, DRC's Ministry of Sports and 'Peace and Sport, *l'Organisation pour la Paix par le Sport*' placed under the High Patronage of HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco, which endorsed the neutral and non-biased status of the Games.

### **A day of friendship and reconciliation**

The day's festivities began with a Peace Race sponsored by the Burundian Olympic Champion **Venuste Niyangabo** (Gold Medal for 5000m in the Atlanta Olympic Games 1996), who is also one of Peace and Sport's 50 Champions for Peace. All participants and several hundred spectators united to run alongside this local legend together, symbolic of their willingness to live in peace.

Young Burundians and Congolese and their team leaders then participated in mixed athletics and football competitions and were introduced to new sports such as karate, judo and basketball.

Lastly, the program offered cultural and folklore activities to enable participants to understand each other better and overcome their prejudices, providing opportunities for communication and mutual support.

Many prominent personalities were present at the Games: notably Jean-Jacques Nyenimigabo, Minister of Youth and Sports in Burundi; Norbert Matwara Nzabande, Provincial Minister of South Kivu; Joel



Bouzou, President and Founder of Peace and Sport, and Lydia Nsekera, member of the International Olympic Committee and President of the Burundi Football Federation.

### **Long-term Action**

The Friendship Games 2010 were the culmination of an extensive peace-building program started in 2008, which uses sport to encourage the process of national unity and ethnic reconciliation.

Alongside the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture and the National Olympic Committee of Burundi, Peace and Sport is committed to supporting the implementation, structuring, development, evaluation and replication of two pilot projects for youth centres in the communes of Gihanga (Bubanza province) and Rugombo (Cibitoke province) in Burundi, both bordering the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Following the renovation of sports facilities and the introduction of organized and educational sports activities in both centres supervised by 13 socio-sports trainers, 300 war orphans and demobilized child soldiers are learning to live in peace and reintegrate into society.

After completing a field study, Peace and Sport is planning to extend its mission to the DRC, deploying similar activities there with the support of the Congolese Presidency, Ministry of Sport and the DRC National Olympic Committee.

From now on, the Friendship Games will be held annually to promote sustainable peace between communities in both countries.

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### **About Peace and Sport**

*Peace and Sport, L'Organisation pour la Paix par le Sport* is a neutral and apolitical international initiative.

Peace and Sport puts sport and its values at the heart of local development projects conducted within communities in crisis around the world. Exercising its missions in post-conflict zones, areas of extreme poverty or lacking social cohesion, Peace and Sport makes sport a vehicle for tolerance, respect, sharing and citizenship at the service of sustainable peace.

Supported by governments, world sport governing bodies, international organizations, major international private companies and international sports champions, Peace and Sport creates synergies between different stakeholders to carry out four types of action:

- Organizing an annual International Forum (next edition in Monaco, 1 - 3 December 2010)
- a Resource Centre for sport and peace,
- The Peace and Sport Awards, to reward individuals and initiatives contributing to peace,
- Locally-Based Projects; concrete actions in different regions of crisis in the world.

Today, Peace and Sport has operations in Cote d'Ivoire, Burundi, Israel-Palestine, Timor Leste, Colombia and in Haiti.

Peace and Sport was founded by Joel Bouzou, current President of the organisation. Mr. Bouzou is an Olympic medallist, world champion of Modern Pentathlon and current Secretary General for the International Union of Modern Pentathlon (UIPM). He is also an Advisor to H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco.