

CAN SPORT PROMOTE PEACE?

Thursday 26 September, 04:30 p.m. - 06:00 p.m., Plenary room



Lilium Thuram, Sophie Lorant, Pascal Boniface, Samuel Ducroquet and Bernard Amsalem

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The Paris 2024 Olympic Games have proven it: when it serves sport, patriotism is a peaceful celebration. Nations parading together, flags flying next to each other and athletes congratulating one another on their efforts. This reality of sport as a vector for peace has been officially recognised in the United Nations development programme as an 'important partner' since 2015. More

MODERATION

Pascal Boniface, Director of IRIS

SPEAKERS

Sophie Lorant, Director of International Relations for the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games Organising Committee

Bernard Amsalem, Former president of the French Athletics Federation, administrator of the French National Olympic and Sports Committee

Samuel Ducroquet, Ambassador for Sport to the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs

Lilium Thuram, President of the Foundation for Education against Racism and for Equality, former international footballer

recently, on 22nd September, 'sport and culture were officially declared as contributing partners to sustainable development,' added Sophie Lorant, Director of International Relations for the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games Organising Committee, speaking on the stage of the plenary room. In the Olympic movement, sport is said to contribute to 11 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Of these objectives, the 11th is of particular importance, as it states that sport contributes to the development of fairer, more peaceful and more open societies. Just like the slogan of Paris 2024, and for which the ceremony already set the tone: openness to diversity outside the stadiums, including in the organisation of the Games, in the Village where all the delegations coexisted despite the conflicts raging in the world. 'Nations and athletes who hate each other because they have inherited a history, share the same meal at lunch time as the others, and the same environment' Sophie Lorant added. How-



Lilian Thuram, Sophie Lorant, Pascal Boniface

ever, should we mix sport and politics? Bernard Amsalem, former President of the French Athletics Federation, had no doubts in this regard: 'Sport is politics in the strategic and societal sense of the term.' Hence the need, he believes, for more ambitious sports policies that reach out not only to the top level, but also to the amateur level, where education is key. 'In our country, we don't do enough sport. Half an hour isn't enough,' he added, citing a World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendation of a minimum of one hour per day.

Samuel Ducroquet, ambassador for sport at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was less idealistic, believing that the primary interest in organising such an event is its international impact. 'But it's not about shining just to impress, but rather about conveying values that are important to France,' namely: preserving the environment, solidarity, inclusion. In this respect, the in-depth work doesn't stop with the event itself, but continues well afterwards at diplomatic level, so that sport is seen 'as a tool for cooperation and rapprochement', he added.

Who better than the former French international Lilian Thuram, world champion in 1998 with France, to bear witness to the emotions that sport arouses and the spirit of communion that it generates? Wouldn't shared emotions be the first step towards living together? 'All

the work I try to do is tell top athletes not to be afraid to speak up. Because an athlete who speaks out can educate a considerable number of young people to change their imagination, move towards more respect and go beyond religious origins.' Bernard Amsalem shared these comments, recalling that in certain competitions, North Koreans jumped into the arms of South Koreans. What might seem like a fun detail can have real implications for how one population perceives another. 'You only see that in sport,' he concluded on this point.

Sport is politics in the strategic and societal sense of the term

Bernard Amsalem

Institutions have only recently begun to take account of the political importance of sport. Pascal Boniface pointed out the slight condescension of the ruling circles towards sport, which has prevailed for a long time, where muscle was systematically opposed to the brain. 'At the beginning of the 80s, Jacques Delors, Minister of Finance, had said that the first newspaper he read in the morning was L'Équipe, and it caused a scandal!' he recalled, amused. Samu-

el Ducroquet acknowledged that within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there was 'a sort of sporting coming-out'. The Ministry, which is entirely focused on the State's external action, has a real added value, he believes, 'which is to bring together powers and dynamic forces' with an unlimited strike force on the international stage.



To win, you need the other. They make you better

Lilian Thuram

Lilian Thuram practised this international openness within the football teams in which he played, in France, Italy and Spain, often sharing the same jersey as foreign players whom he subsequently faced during international competitions. 'When you train with someone of a different nationality, you realise that, indeed, if you had prejudices, they fall away because you end up knowing that person. And above all, what is also very interesting is that, to win, you will understand very quickly that you need that person and that they make you better.' He mentioned an amusing anecdote: after winning the 1998 World Cup in France, Lilian Thuram and his teammates lost in the final against Italy in 2006. In the locker room, he met Fabio Cannavaro, his club teammate at Parma, who said to him: 'You won it in 1998, you can be happy for me, am I your boyfriend or not?' 'It changed everything,' said Thuram. 'If we talk about peace, it is because we must see each other as brothers and sisters.'



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Samuel Ducroquet then evoked a painful memory of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, the assassination of Ugandan long-distance runner Rebecca Cheptegei by her partner in Kenya, one month after the end of the events. This tragedy was widely publicised by the sporting community and raised awareness of the work being done by anti-domestic violence associations, such as Tirop's Angels.

This commitment of athletes to just causes is Lilian Thuram's whole fight. When he was still a player, few of them dared to speak out. The Federations did not encourage them to do so, for reasons of image and sponsorship. But things are changing: 'There are many more athletes speaking out today and that's very good. I think that the Federations must educate athletes to do this and at a very young age, because historically, athletes have been forbidden from speaking out by being told that sport and politics do not mix. But sport is political. Obviously, there will be people who will try to delegitimise your words. Maybe there are sponsors who won't want to work with you because you take sides. History has shown that when athletes, both men and women, speak out, the world becomes a fairer place. Speak up because society needs to change. We must make it better,' he concluded in front of an audience of secondary school students, reminding them of their duty as citizens.