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HE Tarja Halonen, former President of the Republic of Finland
Keynote Speech on the theme '*Being Well to Play Well*'
7th IWG World Conference on Women and Sport
(- 30 minutes -)

Your Excellencies,

Dear friends,

It is a great honour for me to be at **the 7th IWG World Conference on Women and Sport here in Gaborone, Botswana**. It is my first trip to this beautiful country, and I have been keen to learn on Botswana's story towards (its) stability and prosperity.

The theme of women and sport continues to be vital. I am glad we can carry on from the outcomes of the **6th IWG World Conference on Women and Sport in 2014 in Helsinki**, Finland, in which I had an honour to serve as a patron.

Dear friends,

International conventions, already for decades, have recognized equal rights for women and men, but women and girls still face disadvantages (and grievances) in their everyday lives. An important side of empowering is prevention, and sport and play are an integral part of it. UN organizations are also there to support the follow-up on **CEDAW** (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), **Beijing conference**, and **ICPD** (International Conference on Population and Development), where the most challenging part is sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The Millenniums Development Goals (**MDGs**) already included gender mainstreaming and promotion of social justice, and they were a good success. But now, with the Sustainable Development Goals, (**SDGs**) the approach is broader and more encompassing. Every nation has the duty and the right to implement sustainable development. But achieving the Sustainable Development Goals requires not only efforts of governments

and international organisations. Parliaments, private sector, academia, labour movement, civil society and the citizens are there to do their part.

Dear audience,

Here today, we concentrate on the rights of women and girls. If we want to build a better future for all, we need to make sure that **women and girls enjoy the same rights and opportunities as men and boys** and need to be able to live free of violence and discrimination. We must eliminate harmful practices, [such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation], and ensure universal access to **sexual and reproductive health and rights**. Women's participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making should be guaranteed. For example, at the moment, we are working on these themes in UN Secretary General's Every Women Every Child Movement.

Women's participation is not only a question of gender equality but also of economic development and structures of the society. Gender equality creates more sustainable and competitive societies. Decent work – all around the world – is a key.

Sustainable Development Goal 5 creates good basis for moving from the discussion of “why gender equality matters” to the discussion of “how we make equality a reality”.

Dear friends,

I now turn my focus on **health and on its relation to human rights**.

It is a universally accomplished fact that health is a core element in people's well-being and happiness, as well as a major goal of governments, and a cornerstone of sustainable development. Gender equality has an essential impact on health and wellbeing.

Far too many women worldwide still have little or no access to essential, good-quality health services and education, clean air and water, adequate sanitation and good nutrition. **All people are entitled to dignity and human rights** regardless of sex, gender, age, ethnic background,

religion, sexual identity or any other factor. Still this includes their right to health, as signed onto by every country in the world. Many women suffer illness and disability and fail to reach their full potential, resulting in enormous loss and costs for countries both today and for future generations.

I had the privilege as a Co-chair to be involved in preparing the report **"Leading the realization of human rights to health and through health"** together with the High-Level Working Group on the Health and Human Rights of Women, Children and Adolescents. The group was announced by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). WHO's and High Commissioner's actions are essential for supporting the implementation of SDGs, similarly as the work of other UN institutions.

Our conclusion was that healthy women, children and adolescents whose rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, are protected, are at the very heart of sustainable development. **Human rights cannot be fully enjoyed without health.** Only when health and human rights walk hand in hand will women, children and adolescents be able to realize the vision of the Global Strategy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We called on leaders to take up the challenge of translating human rights to health and through health into a reality for all.

We all have the right to the highest possible standard of physical and mental health, without discrimination. We have the right to receive good quality health services and to the essentials for healthy life, including food, water, sanitation, housing and a safe environment.

However, it is **political will that is the key element** so that these rights can come true in national policy making and on political agendas. WHO's Health in All Policies is world-widely implemented approach that systematically focuses on the role of health in all policy-making. This is also across sectors, including sport and physical activity. It enhances health together with other important societal goals such as gender equality in health. **Health-enhancing physical activity that meets the special needs of women and girls** should be included in all policies such as sport, health, education and empowerment. Healthy lifestyle can be promoted by cooperating with other sectors of society to address physical

inactivity. In addition, this should include other priority health issues that women face, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, the prevention of cancer and HIV/AIDS, and other impairments. I warmly encourage you to advocate mainstreaming health and physical activity as part of it.

Dear audience,

We all want to be a bit lazy sometimes, but physical inactivity is a threat to healthy lifestyle. Many women suffer from diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and osteoporosis, which are associated with inadequate physical activity. **Increasing health and enhancing physical activity can significantly benefit the physical, psychological and social wellbeing** of girls and women throughout the whole life span. It can be a challenge for women to maintain their physical activity in all phases of their lives, such as puberty, motherhood, menopause, old age or when combining work and family lives. For instance, almost half of the girls worldwide face dropout from sports in the age of puberty.

Lately, the scientists have underlined the importance of daily physical activity in short terms. It is even better to walk only 3 minutes instead of being totally inactive. I personally try to include walking into my daily routines such as walking to my office.

Women can face obstacles on their way towards a healthier and more active life. Women often have a higher workload at home and more family-related responsibilities than men. And as women's incomes are on average lower than men's, access to health services can be an issue. It is important to support more gender equal structures for **education, work, and care**, and to see that adequate resources, both human and financial, are available. New policies are needed in order to create a strong foundation for women and girls to lead healthy, active lives. And also, to encourage them to participate, and to get their voices heard in sports.

I have had an opportunity to visit several countries in different continents to learn about the latest developments in women's rights. In February, I had an opportunity to visit Lebanon and Jordan, and also the Za'atari Syrian refugee camp. I was convinced that sports and play

are important, also in such difficult circumstances, for girls, as well as for boys.

Dear friends,

Gender-based violence, sexual harassment and abuse exist in all spheres of the society, including sports. Online harassment, linked to violence against women, is a new phenomenon that needs serious attention, also in the field of sport. According to a recent UN report, 73 percent of women had reported experiencing online abuse. More than two thirds of female victims of cyberstalking also experience at least one form of physical, or sexual violence, from an intimate partner.

Sexual and reproductive rights are a substantial part of the human identity and require specific awareness to be protected. **SheDecides and #MeToo campaigns** have brought the issue of sexual harassment and violence visible.

Sport organizations, such as International Olympic Committee (IOC) and governmental organizations, both at international and national levels, have adopted recommendations and published educational materials on sexual harassment and violence. This has also been done with a special focus on gender identity and sexual minorities. What is needed is action, based on the recommendations. I have a feeling that time is appropriate for reforms.

We need a zero tolerance towards all forms of violence. **Safe spaces and supportive environment are needed**, free from harassment and violence, so that women and girls can access physical activity. Sexual harassment and violence against women in the sports world, in its all forms, must be brought into daylight: they can no longer remain taboos. Tackling all forms of sexual harassment and violence in sport is required. This allows women and girls to be equally participating at all levels in physical activity, as well as in coaching and decision-making in sport.

The IAAF (International Association of Athletics Federations) has recently set new limits on testosterone levels for women and since then wide discussion has taken place. I would like to remind that as the Olympic Charter states, the practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must

have the possibility of practising sport. Any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender or otherwise is incompatible. It would be important for sport organizations to consider their decisions on the bases of human rights. Sport is an important part but not everything in our life. We should remember that our decisions in sports have influence also to other parts of life.

Dear friends,

The media not only creates news but builds world views. Media can make women's sport visible. There is still a huge difference in the media coverage of women's and men's sport globally. Not only the quantity, but also the quality is different. Often, female athletes are portrayed differently than male athletes, both in images and in the languages used.

UNESCO calls for fairer media coverage of sportswomen. According to their data and our own daily observations, only 4 per cent of sports media content is dedicated to women's sport and 12 per cent of sports news is presented by women.

Increased visibility in media has an empowering effect on female athletes and young girls, who hope to become professional athletes. But it also affects everyone following sport. Making women's sport more available will increase interest in it. This in turn will hopefully be followed by increased resources and sponsorships.

Finland celebrated 100 years of independence last year. Women's rights were promoted by a program called 100 acts for gender equality. As a part of this program, the Finnish National Broadcasting Company Yle launched a project to promote the amount and visibility of women's sport in its sport coverage. It has already, by now, had an impact on how women's sport is portrayed not only in Yle but also in other media.

[6th IWG Conference and its aims]

Dear audience,

Some positive steps in sports have been reached. I especially welcome the 25 recommendations of the International Olympic Committee to foster gender equality and strengthen women's participation in and through sport. These recommendations support the aims of the Brighton plus Helsinki Declaration and aim to create a roadmap to advance gender equality within and beyond the Olympic movement.

Dear audience,

One aspect, I specially want to underline, is that **men and boys need to be involved** in promoting gender equality. We need their involvement and support. It is important to allow boys and men to have new types of role models and chances in life to pursue careers, lifestyles, and family roles, which lead to greater sharing and equality in life. This contributes to changing attitudes and social norms, leading us to the right direction, even slowly, for the benefit of both women and men.

Many of us women have worked hard for gender equality, and we have **broken different barriers in our lives.** (I also had my hindrances along the way, being the first female union lawyer in Finland, and later on, the first female foreign minister and president.) When breaking glass ceilings, you will get scratches, especially if you are the first one. But what is important is that other women will follow.

I've been often interviewed about how to break a glass ceiling. I have answered: once is not enough. For me, gender equality is not a still photo: the process creates new goals, and continuous work is necessary.

Dear friends,

Here, I would like to mention that wider discussion on these topics will take place at **the side event called *From Helsinki to Gaborone: Leadership, Coaching and Visibility***, on Friday at 4 pm. Please be warmly welcome to join us to this session tomorrow!

This **7th IWG World Conference on Women and Sport** gives us an opportunity to learn and discuss the latest developments in the area of women and sport. I encourage you to actively contribute to these discussions and bring home from Gaborone new ideas and lot of energy to lead the change.

Let's make this a reality! We are stronger together!

Thank you.