

“Interim Report” by the Panel of Experts on
Strengthening Sport Diplomacy

August 2014

1. Introduction

It is not too much to say that since the successful bid to host the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo (hereinafter referred to as “Tokyo Games”) last September, all of Japan started to move ahead aiming at success in year 2020. Upon the success to host the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe disclosed “Sport for Tomorrow,” a programme to make international contributions through sports. Diplomatic authorities also must strengthen international contribution and international exchanges through sports in a full-fledged manner. In this regard, the “Panel of Experts on Strengthening Sport Diplomacy,” established under Mr. Fumio Kishida, Minister for Foreign Affairs, has held four meetings since February this year. Moreover, the Panel also held a special meeting inviting experts from France. In the previous meetings, discussions between members of the Panel were held and international sports figures and intellectuals were invited to present their opinions. The Panel intends to deepen exchanges of opinions between Panel members as well as with experts from various fields. However, considering the necessity to take specific actions before full-fledged preparation of the Tokyo Games begins, the Panel judged that it would be appropriate to summarize issues, for which specific measures or actions should be taken or early discussion is required, from among exchanged opinions. The Panel also judged that it would be appropriate to submit the opinions thus summarized as an interim report. Therefore, the Panel hereby submits an interim report in which specific suggestions and proposals from the discussions and issues related thereto are summarized.

There are following two basic ideas for summarizing the proposals. First one is the “Diplomacy for sports” meaning that diplomatic authorities make various efforts for the development of sports. This includes an effort to avoid negative influences of the international political factors to sports activities, in other words, “Diplomacy to protect sports.” Another idea is to utilize the sensation or influence of sports for broadening and improving diplomacy or realizing universal values, in other words, “Diplomacy by sports.” This includes a viewpoint of utilizing sports as soft power and coordinating sports with cultural diplomacy. Moreover, sport is a popular field for everyone and anyone can join regardless of their gender or age. Therefore, it is also possible to strengthen diplomacy comprehensively by utilizing the advantage of sports as a useful means of public diplomacy.¹

When considering measures and policies for strengthening sport diplomacy, it is appropriate to set and pursue the goals of the policies while carrying out coordination with not only sports organizations but also private enterprises or NPOs/NGOs in perspective.

¹ A type of diplomatic activity, which, unlike traditional diplomacy between governments, directly appeal to people or public opinion of a foreign country through public relations tools or cultural exchanges, while coordinating with private sectors. (Website of MOFA: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/comment/faq/culture/gaiko.html>)

2. Proposals

2-1 Sports and Development

Sports (or physical education in a broad sense) can directly or indirectly improve the welfare of an individual or group through contribution to improvement of athletic ability of the partner country. For example, there are sports that become a life skill such as swimming. Moreover, it is also possible to realize balanced growth of the body and mind of youth (prevention of juvenile delinquency and improvement of health of all generations) through sports. While the mainstream discussion on the roles of development assistance are to provide an “opportunity” for growth/improvement of developing countries, sports can become a useful tool because sports have a high affinity with catalyst functions of such development. Moreover, focusing on the competitiveness of sports, when an international athlete emerges, the image of that country can be improved and, as a result, the international reputation of that country also improves. Therefore, it is also useful to provide support from such a viewpoint.

Thus, we propose that sports at school and sports for the purpose of improving welfare at the community/individual level and also improving a national image are placed as a part of economic and social development assistance in a broader sense. In this regard, the following efforts will be implemented. Moreover, in that case, the expansion of dispatching of volunteers for sports from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and utilization of technical cooperation (acceptance of trainees, technical cooperation project) should be carried out. Note that from a viewpoint of assistance for a developing country, attention must be paid to the system and environment of the aid receiving country and implementation of a follow-up such as the evaluation of the effect of policies should be discussed. On that basis, it is important to establish a system by which medium- to long-term continuous assistance in the field of sports can be carried out.

(1) To expand correct understanding about the popularization of sports activities among developing countries (ex. It is useful for improved health, reduction of healthcare costs and crime prevention.) so that such understanding leads to a request for cooperation. Specifically, to carry out educational activities at schools, holding seminars and exchanging information at the administrative level (assistance for setting up sports-related policies, etc.).

(2) To provide assistance for athletic facilities and equipment to educational facilities. For this purpose, in addition to direct assistance from the Government, indirect assistance such as providing cooperation for smoothing procedures when sports organizations are willing to provide facilities to developing countries should also be enhanced.

(3) To support nutritional enhancement and physical preparation for the empowerment of both

individuals and groups by use of sports.

(4) In order to provide assistance for growing international-level athletes and to promote the participation of developing countries in international competitions, it is meaningful to send coaches and athletes from Japan to such countries as well as to invite these people from such countries to Japan. For this purpose, it is necessary to provide precise care such as obtaining the cooperation of retired Japanese athletes.

(5) To provide assistance in the field of education targeting the youth by introducing experience through sports (particularly, sports club activities at schools). Specifically, in addition to assistance for the introduction of physical education at schools including cooperation for establishing curricula, Japan's models including successful experience through sports club activities will be transmitted.

2-2 Sports and Peace

One of the ideals of Baron Coubertin of France, father of the modern Olympics, was establishing peace in the world through sports. It is explicitly described in the Fundamental Principles of the Olympic Charter that "The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity." Moreover, as described in the "Olympic ceasefire resolution" adopted at the United Nations in recent years, sports have been, and will be, an important opportunity for pursuing peace.

Sports enable people to respect their opponent and to increase the spirit of mutual understanding by competing in accordance with fair rules and by sharing the same experience. Therefore, the power of sports can be utilized as a catalyst for revitalizing the community or the consolidation of peace in a region following a dispute or a region struck by a disaster. Moreover, it may also be possible to contribute to confidence building between confronting countries or groups through sports activities. Thus, it must be noted that sports can produce peace.

It is desirable that Japan will make a contribution to lead the power of sports to peace building and specifically, the Panel suggests the following efforts.

(1) Promotion of international exchanges utilizing sports for confidence building: Dispatching/invitation of sports coaches and players (including youth) for exchanges. Particularly, sports figures and youth are invited from regions in a conflict or post-conflict regions in order to provide them with opportunities for mutual understanding and joint activity. This will also become an opportunity for the Japanese public to change their images about such disputed regions.

(2) In order to implement the above (1), to discuss the "Third country project" which aims at coordinating not only with a counterpart country but also with a third country to jointly carry out

cooperation.

(3) To host seminars and related events on sports and peace building in Japan, aimed at raising awareness of international exchanges/mutual understanding and peace.

(4) To provide cooperation for the formation of a national team or promotion of a certain sport (including a traditional sport) in a case where the national team or the sport serves as a symbol of national unification or social integration following a conflict. Moreover, for the protection and promotion of the traditional sports of each country, which are not necessarily internationalized but are social heritages, international cooperation should be carried out in coordination with international organizations and NGOs/NPOs.

2-3 Sport and Culture

When a sport event is held, it is not rare that food culture, customs, or national character and local characteristics of the host country attract attention of media. Many sports activities are regarded as a part of the cultural activity and therefore a sport event can be correlated with a cultural event (in the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, various cultural events are scheduled to be held as well). As described in the following proposals, if cultural activities and sports are integrated, it becomes possible to transmit the Japanese culture to the world and further enhance understanding of Japan.

(1) To proactively utilize sports figures for people-to-people exchanges by schemes of the Japan Foundation (focusing on the introduction of Japanese culture).

(2) To implement cultural events on the occasion of an international sport event hosted by Japan (similarly, Japanese embassies should hold events for introducing Japan in a manner that integrates sports and cultural elements).

(3) When international exchanges through sports are carried out, such projects will be planned and publicized by utilizing various cultural factors such as music or art.

(4) To plan a project, such as a meeting, seminar or demonstration under a theme of, for example, “the Spirit of Budo (Martial Arts),” focus on the relationship between traditional culture and traditional sports.

2-4 Sports and Women, Seniors and the Handicapped

Moreover, it is conceivable that the participation of people, who are positioned as socially vulnerable persons, in society can be promoted more by borrowing the power of sports. It is necessary to focus on the role of sports when considering the issues of how to promote participation in society by such people and how to empower such individuals. In this regard, the Panel suggests

the following measures.

(1) From a perspective of gaining the recognition of para-sports, such as the Paralympics, the Deaflympics and the Special Olympics, diplomatic authorities should support the hosting of an international competition of the para-sport or an international seminar in Japan and at the same time consider policies and measures to raise awareness of such events such as the participation of high-ranking government officials in ceremonies.

(2) To implement the dispatch of coaches and players to developing countries/training of coaches and players in Japan for the purpose of the promotion of para-sports in other countries, including developing countries.

(3) In connection with the above (2), to develop equipment for para-sports by utilizing the science and technologies of Japanese enterprises. The Government should support the spread of such equipment to the world.

(4) To carry out promotion of senior sports and educational activities on the extension of a healthy life to other countries and spread Japan's good practice. From such a perspective, policies and measures to utilize the power of active Japanese seniors for a contribution to international friendship (e.g., expansion of senior overseas volunteers) should be proceeded further.

(5) To provide assistance for the coaching of sports by women and raising female coaches in a country where women's empowerment is necessary. In addition, the dispatch of personnel and provision of equipment for this purpose should be carried out.

(6) To provide assistance for raising volunteers who can deal with participants from abroad (particularly women and the handicapped) for cases where an international competition is held.

2-5 Preparation of a Basis for the Implementation of Sport Diplomacy

In order for the Japanese sport field to develop and for Japanese coaches and players to play active roles abroad, it is necessary to increase Japan's presence in the field of international sports. Generally speaking, the Government should pay attention so that sports organizations are not unnecessarily interfered with politically and so the original purpose of the sport is not damaged. On that basis, the Panel lists the following issues as policies and measures that should be taken not only by MOFA but by the entire Government.

(1) To strengthen support for sending Japanese people as staff or director-level officers to international sports organizations, sports organizations of Asia, and international organizations related to sports.

(2) To share knowledge with countries which will host or have hosted an international competition

in recent years (such as the United Kingdom, Brazil and the Republic of Korea), construct cooperative relations and deepen bilateral relationships with such countries.

(3) To appoint an ambassador in charge of sports.

(4) To hold exchange events of athletes and sports officials mainly aiming to facilitate international understanding.

2-6 Preparation of Domestic System

In order to effectively promote sport diplomacy on the basis of the above (2-5), it is necessary to establish a domestic system including education for Japanese people. Particularly, the Panel considers that the following issues which are directly related to international activities should immediately be discussed by the entire Government.

(1) Expansion of the international division in every sports organization and the promotion of sharing international information among such organizations.

(2) The Government should consider the support of Japanese athletes after their retirement and prepare an environment where they can easily participate in activities for international contribution.

(3) To introduce policies and measures for stabilizing sports organizations such as providing support for their independence and autonomy.

(4) To carry out social education on para-sports and promotion of women's participation (particularly, increase the recognition of the Paralympics and Special Olympics).

(5) To carry out education on the meaning of fair and sound participation by players, officials and the audience in international competitions.

(END)