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Mmasekgoa Masire-Mwamba, Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General

5<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting

New Delhi, India

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Your Excellency, Minister Gill, other honorable ministers, special guests, I am delighted to attend this important meeting.

As the Deputy Secretary General responsible for the youth programmes in the Commonwealth, the activities that the Secretary-General has laid out will come under my remit.

Our Sports Development Adviser sits within the Youth Affairs Division, and you have heard of the synergies of youth and sport – indeed, many of your Ministries are responsible for both.

The Secretary General has spoken about the importance of mainstreaming sport within youth programming.

This is an urgent priority for a Commonwealth in which more than 60% of its two billion people is under the age of 30.

It is a challenge in every Commonwealth country.

We know that the habits of mind, self-esteem and confidence forged in sport can assist young men and women find and succeed in employment, and become effective parents and citizens.

But we should recognise that we are yet to employ this insight in youth programming.

We also need to engage youth themselves more honestly and effectively in planning, conducting and evaluating appropriate sport-related youth programming.

So sport and youth are one.

But the secret of 'mainstreaming' is that sport belongs everywhere.

I believe it can find its way into the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat's many other Divisions and activities.

Take health.

We now know that sport and physical activity can significantly improve health by reducing the incidence of non-communicable diseases, the so-called 'lifestyle diseases', such as diabetes, cardio-respiratory illnesses, and many forms of cancer.

While this is well known (if not adhered to in practice) in the economically advanced countries, it is increasingly a major challenge in the developing Commonwealth as well.

As they experience rapid urbanization, developing countries are losing two of their most important health assets: healthy diets, and high levels of physical activity.

Faced with this trend, the best strategy for public health is population-wide prevention, and sport and physical activity can play a significant role in this strategy, along with the reduction of tobacco and alcohol use, and better diets.

This approach was endorsed by the 2007 Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting in Geneva, and most recently by the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting last year in Trinidad and Tobago.

Or take education.

My colleagues and I have also seen the contribution that sport and physical activity can make to the realization of basic education – because good physical education and sport programmes enhance school retention, school safety and school spirit, and contribute to healthy growth and development.

Physical education and school sport also contribute significantly to the inclusion and affirmation of girls and young women, giving them the confidence to persevere in their studies, even in those societies where traditional gender hierarchies discourage them.

Or take gender – where the Secretary-General has already mentioned that powerful mixed-sex teenage football project in Kenya.

For these and other reasons, my colleagues and I fully endorse the strategy that will be set out in the next few minutes by the Chair of the Commonwealth Advisory Body on Sport, Bruce Kidd, and by the Commonwealth Secretariat's Sports Development Advisor, Swaran Singh Chhabra.

It builds on what we have done, and the power of our networks.

It is ambitious, but realisable.

I believe that it is impossible to have healthy, inclusive societies without healthy, inclusive sport.

Let us hear more from them now....

**ENDS**