

# Bridging Divides through Youth Athletics

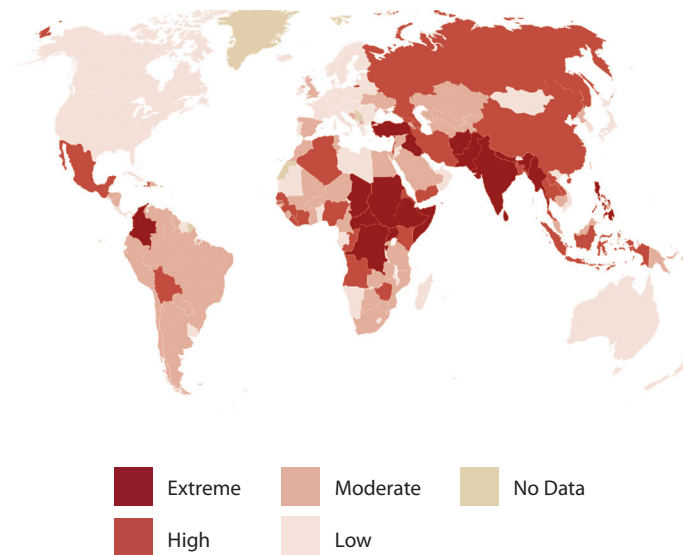
**FACT: As many as 10 million children a year may witness or be victims of violence, according to the National Center for Children Exposed to Violence.**

## THE PROBLEM

Conflict plagues the globe and makes victims of our children. More and more of them grow up surrounded by prejudice, ignorance and a lack of understanding. Without the interactions and role models to help break down these barriers, these children will learn that violence and hatred are the ways to deal with differences – and repeat the cycle. This problem does not only affect children in war zones. Children around the world are exposed to hatred and prejudices born of social, economic, religious, cultural and sexual differences and ignorance.

As leaders of tomorrow, children play an important role in bridging divides. Most conflict resolution initiatives, however, are focused on adult populations who may already have deeply engrained prejudices. Tapping the resource of tomorrow is a huge opportunity: Athletic programs bring children from conflicting groups together and help break down prejudices and teach against hate. In the Middle East, Israeli and Palestinian children who play basketball together learn that on the court they are all equal. In Ireland, Protestant and Catholic children learn from coaches that equality and ability to work together can extend beyond the playing field. With the number of children being raised in conflict on the rise, the need for programs like these to bring children together and build hope for peace is greater than ever.

Global Map of Conflict and Political Violence Risk



Source: Maplecroft Maps, "Global Map of Conflict and Political Violence Risk," <http://alcan.maplecroft.com/loadmap?template=map&issueID=6>.

## WHY NOW?

**"Sport can play a role in improving the lives of individuals, not only individuals, I might add, but whole communities. I am convinced that the time is right to build on that understanding, to encourage governments, development agencies and communities to think how sport can be included more systematically in the plans to help children, particularly those living in the midst of poverty, disease and conflict."**

– Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General, on proclaiming 2005 as the International Year of Sport and Physical Education

## THE OPPORTUNITY

Well-designed athletics programs for youth are a cost-effective and practical tool to provide common ground. They teach youth through positive role models and serve as a conduit to bring children together to learn about prejudice.

Donors can make an impact by:

- **Supporting programs in regions of interest.** Many athletics programs are focused on a specific area of conflict. Programs exist in locations that span from South Africa to New Orleans.
- **Sponsoring training for coaches.** Leadership is a key component of athletics programs. Training is required to help talented athletics coaches also teach children about violence and hatred.
- **Contributing to material needs.** Athletics programs require many materials. Essential tools include a safe physical space to play and equipment to play with. Whether it is a gift of a basketball or building of a basketball court, donations of materials can help teach children about hatred and violence.
- **Supporting research.** While some research has been conducted, more evidence is needed to convince both private donors and governments of the importance of investing in and prioritizing these programs and to share best practices.

## Additional Resources

- **The International Platform on Sport and Development** is a website dedicated to sharing knowledge, building good practice and facilitating partnerships for sport and development ([http://www.sportanddev.org/learnmore/sport\\_and\\_peace\\_building/index.cfm](http://www.sportanddev.org/learnmore/sport_and_peace_building/index.cfm)).
- **Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group** is an initiative that engages multiple stakeholders in the development of practical recommendations for the integration of Sport for Development and Peace into domestic and international development policies and programs ([http://rtpc.convio.net/site/PageServer?pagename=iwg\\_home](http://rtpc.convio.net/site/PageServer?pagename=iwg_home)).