



SPEECH FOR THE UNDP/PAPP SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentleman

This is far from being just the first act in building a sports centre, this is the beginning of a Palestinian sports strategy which will give young Palestinians the opportunity to train and compete, firstly among themselves and then hopefully with their international peers, just like sportsmen and women all over the world.

This will be the first centre of its kind in the occupied Palestinian territory, so I am very pleased to attend today's ceremony.

The centre will be made of stone, steel, aluminum, and concrete. But that is not what will make this centre dynamic. It is the children, the youth, and the athletes of the area and country who will give this place a pulse.

The development of Palestinian sport has been as much a victim of the occupation as Palestinian self rule and prosperity. Sport can be a catalyst for development, social cohesion, and reflects local, regional and national pride.

This centre will be in Ramallah but it will be accessible to all of the West Bank. We hope that the success of this centre will lead to the building of additional sports facilities making sport and training more accessible to all.

We particularly welcome the contribution of the governments of India, Brazil and South Africa in this project. Three countries where sports are played with a passion.

India is of course renowned for cricket, South Africa for rugby and cricket and it will host next year's World Cup. Brazil has become the single country most identified with football even though it was invented far from its shores.



Personally, I would love to see more rugby being played in this region but I suspect that football will take precedence.

Over the next three years India, Brazil and South Africa will contribute US\$3 million to support projects that will alleviate poverty in the occupied Palestinian territory.

This one will particularly serve youth, a sector of society which is often neglected.

The construction of this centre will provide a forum for athletics, gymnastics, basketball, handball, volleyball and football.

Another component of this strategy is the Palestinian Youth Sports League which UNDP is funding with India, Brazil and South Africa. This will provide the competitive forum for excellence as much as the centre will provide physical facilities to support the league.

I would like to thank the Minister for Youth and Sports, the Mayor of Ramallah, the Governor of Ramallah, the Governments of India, Brazil, South Africa and their representatives and all those that contributed to this project.

We look forward to taking our place in the stands for the opening game whatever that may be.