

# Harnessing the Power of Sports for Global Diplomacy: UNITAR Division for Multilateral Diplomacy Concept Note

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## Message from the Division for Multilateral Diplomacy

The following brochure has been designed and developed by the Division for Multilateral Diplomacy (DMD) at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). It has been created to provide valuable insights into the Division's tailored training initiatives aimed at leveraging the power of sports to drive positive change in the world. Developed for delegates of government ministries, National Olympic Committees, Permanent Missions, and partners in the private sector, NGOs, and civil society, these programmes offer comprehensive training on sports and diplomacy.

Should you wish to explore these opportunities further or discuss customized training solutions, please reach out to [philippe.aubert@unitar.org](mailto:philippe.aubert@unitar.org) or [marcal.jane@unitar.org](mailto:marcal.jane@unitar.org).



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## UNITAR and the Division for Multilateral Diplomacy

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) was established in 1965 as an autonomous body within the United Nations with the purpose of enhancing the effectiveness of the work of the United Nations and its Member States in the fields of peace and security and in the promotion of economic and social development.

UNITAR designs and conducts worldwide more than 670 different training and knowledge sharing events per year, equivalent to some 19,847 event days over the calendar year, for more than 133,420 beneficiaries, including diplomats and other government officials, non-governmental representatives, local authorities, and other stakeholders. The Institute works primarily in six broad thematic areas, including strengthening multilateralism, promoting economic development and social inclusion, advancing environmental sustainability, promoting peace and increasing resilience and humanitarian action and strengthening the implementation of the Agenda 2030.

At the heart of UNITAR, the Division for Multilateral Diplomacy delivers training with the main objective to strengthen multilateralism and support the United Nations intergovernmental machinery, through the delivery of workshops and other training activities aimed at addressing the needs of diplomats, government officials, international civil servants, and the private sector. UNITAR's Division for Multilateral Diplomacy activities position itself as a cross-cutting Division within the Institute, in order to support countries in strengthening national institutions for capacity-building at all levels, and fostering the participation of Member States in global governance, contributing to the acceleration of the 2030 Agenda. Due to its nature, the focus of the Division extends over a wide range of policy domains and training topics, including the preparation for key assignments within the United Nations System, environmental and climate change diplomacy, economic diplomacy, human rights diplomacy, international law, frontier diplomacy and other related topics. In doing so, it focuses predominantly on capacities and skills development activities, such as diplomatic report writing, public speaking, media relations and negotiation techniques, public and digital diplomacy, among many others.

## Background

Sports have always captured the global imagination, and the significance of sports and physical activity for overall health and well-being is widely recognised. However, in recent years, greater interest has been directed at the potential for sports to become a conduit for peacebuilding and diplomatic promotion, acting as an extension of other foreign policy and soft power strategies (as witnessed in the Winter Olympics in South Korea, as well as the World Cups in Russia and Qatar). In fact, many governments have begun appointing “Sports Ambassadors” in recognition of the impact sports has on foreign affairs.

With increasing attention focused on the interlinkages between sports, law, and diplomacy, there is a rising demand for professionals who possess the cultural sensitivity and leadership skills to adeptly harness the power of sports as a tool for international relations.



**FOOTBALL  
FOR THE GOALS**

The United Nations uses Sports Diplomacy to foster peace, development, and social cohesion globally, recognizing the unifying power of sports in bridging divides. In light of this, the UN implements programmes that empower marginalized groups, including women, girls, persons with disabilities, and refugees, such as Football For The Goals (FFTG). By collaborating with governments, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector, these initiatives accelerate the adoption of the SDGs, increasing access to education and socio-economic opportunities through sports-based interventions and fundraising.

## Overall Goal

It is imperative to sustain and enhance these efforts, and to continue to leverage and unleash the potential for sports to drive positive change in the world. Therefore, in line with the General Assembly’s call for international organizations to raise awareness of “Sport for Development and Peace”, the Division for Multilateral Diplomacy at UNITAR offers an array of activities in the field of sports, building on the success of UNITAR’s Core Diplomatic Training programmes and Executive Diplomas.

Using well-tested methods and techniques taught by UNITAR to diplomats and business leaders alike, these activities aim to enhance the diplomatic skills of strategic partners, with the goal of preparing participants to assume leadership roles in the field of international sports, as well as advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in their respective organisations and communities. In particular, these programmes seek to advance the following SDGs:





## Executive Diploma in Sports Diplomacy

The Executive Diploma in Sports Diplomacy serves as UNITAR's flagship course in Sports Diplomacy, providing participants with training on sports diplomacy as well as governance and regulation of sports by building a practical and in-depth understanding of how the disciplines interact with international law, diplomatic practice, and national and provincial brand-building.

In February 2024, UNITAR delivered the highly successful Executive Diploma for the National Olympic & Paralympic Committee and Ministry of Sport of Saudi Arabia. The programme consists of three back-to-back skills-based workshops, running over five days (the total duration of the programme may be tailored as needed). The workshops equip participants with knowledge and practical competencies for effective engagement in international sports settings, enriching their professional performances. Each workshop may last one day, with the remaining two days featuring visits to key international organizations in the field of sports. Workshops can include:

### Sports Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice

This workshop will provide participants with concrete knowledge on the direct and indirect relationship between national and international sports and foreign policy. Students will be introduced to international relations concepts such as soft power and cultural diplomacy, and will be taught the various ways in which sports interlinks with foreign policy objectives. Further to this, participants will be introduced to the concept of sustainable development and will be given opportunities to understand the different methods through which sports may contribute to the SDGs. Participants will equally be given insights on the functioning, purpose, and organisation of multilateral conferences: an element which is crucial both in the worlds of multilateral diplomacy and international sports governance. Participant's understanding of the topics above will be reinforced through analysis of case studies, interactive exercises, and group discussions.

### Protocol and Etiquette in Sports Diplomacy

An important part of diplomacy in general, and of sports diplomacy in particular, is protocol and etiquette. In the world of sports today, hundreds of formal and informal, official and unofficial, meetings and conferences will be held each year. Hosting sports events and meetings necessitates being confident in matters of protocol and etiquette and being able to adapt to the main differences in etiquette in different cultures. Participants will gain skills on how to apply objective tools and models to decipher foreign cultures with greater ease and to avoid potential faux-pas in meetings or event settings.

### Key Skills for International Sporting Organizations

In any international professional environment, be it in sports law, sports diplomacy, international law or international relations, professionals are valued for their ability to demonstrate leadership, excellent negotiation skills, public speaking skills, and an ease in cosmopolitan communication. This workshop will help students thrive in their future employment positions by adding skill-based value to the theoretic modules in the programme. The training will enhance participants' understanding and appreciation of the definition of leadership and the qualities of a strong leader, the differing styles of leadership particular to different cultural contexts, the importance and practice of effective communication skills, techniques and strategies to practice strong leadership in times of crisis, and in the process of decision making to effectively succeed in an international sporting context.



## Visits to Key International Organizations in the Field of Sports

Throughout the programme, participants will have the opportunity to visit key international organizations, such as the **International Olympic Committee**, **UEFA**, the **Court of Arbitration for Sport** and the **Centre for Sport & Human Rights**. These visits provide participants with invaluable opportunities to engage with key stakeholders in the field, receiving lectures from experts in the field of sports and diplomacy. This will allow participants to exchange best practices with the most successful sporting organizations in the planet, as well as forge meaningful connections with professionals and leaders who are shaping the future of sports diplomacy.

Overall, the experiential learning offered through these visits will complement the theoretical knowledge and practical insights gained through the programme, empowering participants to become effective advocates for sports diplomacy and agents of positive change in their respective fields.

## Learning Objectives

By the end of the programme, participants will be able to:

- Understand the key debates surrounding sporting events and diplomacy and analyze the structures and actors in international sports governance;
- Analyze historical and current cases of sports being applied as a soft power tool;
- Describe how international dispute resolution works within the sporting context;
- Apply objective tools and models to decipher foreign cultures with greater ease and experience more confidence when hosting or attending international social events;
- Apply negotiation and public speaking techniques effectively when communicating with stakeholders in the sports, diplomatic, and legal sectors.



*Photo 1: Workshop on Protocol and Etiquette in Sports Diplomacy, February 2024 [UNITAR]*



*Photo 2: Visit to the International Olympic Committee [IOC]*



## Further Activities in Sports Diplomacy

Drawing upon our expansive network of experts from UEFA, UNESCO, NGOs and other organizations, UNITAR is poised to launch further activities in the field of Sports Diplomacy, spanning a wide range of thematic areas. Importantly, field visits to key international organizations, like IOC, UEFA, UNESCO and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, may all be included as a part of these programmes.

The areas listed below are examples of the themes UNITAR can train on, with a wide scope for the kinds of programmes to be delivered in each area, from short workshops to Executive Diploma programmes and high-level conferences and meetings:

### Sports Management

In order to leverage the power of sport to strengthen international relations and increase prestige, a profound understanding of the tenets of sports management is necessary. From operational, strategic and performance management, to working with the media, professionals in the sports sector require a comprehensive skillset to ensure sporting events and organizations are managed effectively. The workshop also covers financial management and marketing and sponsorship strategies, empowering participants to develop action plans for implementing effective management practices.

### Sustainable Development

The SDG Summit in September 2023 found that the Sustainable Development Goals are significantly off track, with the United Nations vowing to redouble efforts to meet the SDGs before 2030. In light of this, UNITAR aims to train individuals through dedicated workshops designed to raise their awareness of the Goals, including interactive discussions and case study analyses to identify actionable strategies to advance the SDGs through sports, as well as how to integrate sustainable practices and initiatives in different organizations.

### Women's Leadership

The landscape of women's leadership in sports, presents a need for advancement, with only 27% of executive positions in international federations held by women. Therefore, UNITAR offers a training programme to empower women as leaders within sporting organizations while simultaneously harnessing the potential of sports diplomacy for broader societal benefit, helping advance SDG 5 and 10 (Gender Equality and Reduced Inequalities). With a focus on skills development, participants will hone their abilities in leadership, communication, negotiation, and decision-making. Likewise, attracting participants from diverse organizations will provide networking opportunities, encouraging strategic engagement and dialogue, helping advance gender equality and social inclusion across the realm of international sport.

### Human Rights

Despite its immense economic and social impact, the sports industry faces increasing scrutiny regarding adherence to human rights standards, encompassing issues such as labour rights, inclusion, and environmental sustainability. Therefore, UNITAR aims responds to the growing demand for accountability and transparency within the sports industry through dedicated training programmes on human rights due diligence in sports. This will help organizations to mitigate risks, enhance their reputation, and contribute positively to society. Through practical strategies and tools, participants will learn to integrate human rights





considerations into sporting organizations' operations, including the use of case studies and best practices from experts in the sports industry to inspire and guide participants in facilitating a culture of responsibility and accountability within their organizations.

### Sports Governance & International Law

Over the last 20 years, the key issue in the governance of international sports has been doping, in particular following the case of Lance Armstrong in 2012. Therefore, UNITAR proposes comprehensive programmes in International Sports Law to explore anti-doping regulations as well as other key concepts in the field, such as dispute resolution mechanisms and athlete eligibility and nationality rules. Dedicated visits will provide practical insights into the reality of sports governance structures, including the roles and responsibilities of international sports federations and national governing bodies. This will ensure participants gain a deep understanding of the legal frameworks that govern the world of sport, and the interaction between sports law and other fields of law. Participants will similarly gain practical insights into compliance requirements and best practices tailored to the sports business environment, exploring strategies for promoting transparency, accountability, and integrity.



## UNITAR's Strategic Advantage

We leverage UNITAR's **status as a United Nations organization**, as well as our **consolidated network to cooperate with many of the organizations listed below** and deliver tailored training activities in the field of sports diplomacy. As such, UNITAR is in the unique position, based on its location and network, to offer high-level training in the field of sports, facilitated by experts from the top international sporting organizations, such as IOC and UEFA. Programmes span a wide variety of subject areas, and may feature visits to these important organizations, as well as **exclusive access to the Palais des Nations in Geneva**.

Located at the heart of the United Nations system in Geneva, UNITAR is widely recognised to be the premier institution in the realm of diplomatic training. With over **60 years of experience** in building the capacity of states to effectively engage in the international system and advance their strategic goals, UNITAR possess the expertise and network to make a significant impact in this emerging field of Sports Diplomacy, **hosting programmes in Geneva and around the world**.

Furthermore, Geneva is home to over 20 UN agencies, over 40 international organizations, and 181 diplomatic missions, making it an ideal hub for leveraging the power of sports to address global challenges and promote sustainable development. Furthermore, Switzerland, and the Lake Geneva region in particular hosts a significant number of international sports federations and organizations, which further enhances its suitability as a destination for sports-related initiatives. Some prominent federations include:

- International Olympic Committee (IOC)
- International Basketball Federation (FIBA)
- Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)
- Union of European Football Associations (UEFA)
- Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI)
- International Ski Federation (FIS)

## Training Methodology

The outlined training programmes are designed to be highly interactive and participatory. Participants will engage in lectures and presentations to gain foundational knowledge, while role-playing exercises and simulations will enhance soft skills relevant to sports diplomacy, such as leadership, etiquette, and intercultural communication. Experience sharing through panels and/or group discussions will foster peer learning, and real-world case studies will develop problem-solving abilities. Likewise, field visits allow participants to interact with key organizations and apply their knowledge in real-world contexts.

This holistic approach, incorporating concept learning, experiential activities, and reflective exercises, ensures participants acquire both theoretical knowledge, and practical skills to excel in sports diplomacy.

## Resource Persons

The trainers, resource persons and speakers selected by UNITAR are experts in various fields of multilateral diplomacy and sports diplomacy, including academics and practitioners from both within and outside the United Nations system who regularly teach within the framework of UNITAR's Division for Multilateral Diplomacy.