



Special Olympics Chairman Tim Shriver seeks Papal support to build inclusive world

Special Olympics athletes met Pope Francis during official audience at The Vatican

Rome, 13 October 2017 – Special Olympics Chairman Timothy Shriver delivered an impassioned speech at an audience with Pope Francis in Rome today. Speaking in front of Special Olympics athletes and delegates, Dr. Shriver asked Pope Francis to support the movement as it embarks on an ‘inclusion revolution’ around the world.

‘Your Holiness: We are here to lead a revolution,’ said Dr. Shriver. ‘But it is not a violent revolution or an angry revolution or a vengeful revolution. We are here to lead the inclusion revolution, a revolution of the heart,’ he added.

‘The inclusion revolution is led by those who are poor in the eyes of a distracted world but are rich in love. It is determined to break down the invisible walls of fear and selfishness that separate us from one another. It is motivated by our restless dissatisfaction with intolerance, injustice, and inactivity. Our athletes are ready to play, with refugees, migrants, with all, they are ready. We look to you, your holiness, to be our leader,’ added Dr. Shriver.

Dr. Shriver leads Special Olympics, a global movement of 5.6 million athletes in 172 countries. The audience who met Pope Francis at the Vatican included Special Olympics athletes from nine European countries. The athletes are in Rome to take part in a Unified football tournament supported



by the Knights of Columbus, where athletes with and without intellectual disabilities play sport together.

Pope Francis met the call for support with his own endorsement of Special Olympics, a movement he described as a 'beautiful reality. 'You are the symbol of a sport that opens your eyes and heart to the value and dignity of individuals and people who would otherwise be subjected to prejudices and exclusion.

'In these days you will have the opportunity to reaffirm the importance of "unified" sport, through which athletes with and without intellectual disabilities play together. This beautiful reality, which you carry out with commitment and conviction, nourishes the hope of a positive and fruitful future of sport, because it makes it a real opportunity for inclusion and involvement.

'Do not be tired of showing the world of sport your shared commitment to building more fraternal societies in which people can grow and develop and fully realize their abilities. In this sense, sport is one of those universal languages that overcome cultural, social, religious and physical differences, and manages to unite people, making them part of the same game and starrng together of victories and defeats,' added Pope Francis.

Each Special Olympics athlete present at the audience had the opportunity to meet with Pope Francis. But it was a younger athlete, four-year-old Gemma Pompili from Rome, who captivated the Pontiff.

Gemma was invited to present Pope Francis with a pair of red Special Olympics branded sports shoes. Gemma, who is part of the Special Olympics Young Athletes programme in Italy, where athletes with intellectual disabilities are introduced to sport and play from the age of two, was subsequently invited to sit beside His Holiness for the duration of the audience event, a rare honour for any invitee.



Dr. Shriver is currently on a four-day visit to Rome, Italy. On Thursday, Dr. Shriver accepted the 2017 Mecenato dello Sport award for 2017 at an event at the Italian National Olympic Committee, on behalf of 'Special Olympics athletes all over the world.'

The Mecenato dello Sport award is one of Italy's premium sports accolades. Former winners include Massimo Moratti, Nerio Alessandri, and Claudio Ranieri. The award was presented to Dr. Shriver by Gianni Di Pietro, an Italian businessman who founded the award in honour of his father, Varaldo di Pietro, and Giovanni Malagò, president of the National Italian Olympic Committee.

Part of Dr. Shriver's visit to Rome also includes a showpiece celebrity Unified football match at the at the Pio XI Sport Centre, which is operated by the Knights of Columbus in Rome. The two team were captained by Giovanni Malagò of the Italian National Olympic Committee and Italian Minister of Sports Luca Lotti.

The Unified football tournament runs from Friday 13th of October until Sunday 15th of October and features five-a-side teams from France, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Italy (4 teams), Portugal, Spain, Belgium, and Romania. It has been made possible by the support of the Knights of Columbus.

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About Special Olympics

Special Olympics is a global movement that unleashes the human spirit through the transformative power and joy of sports, every day around the world. We empower people with intellectual disabilities to become accepted and valued members of their communities, which leads to a more respectful and inclusive society for all. Using sports as the catalyst and programming around health and education, Special Olympics is fighting inactivity, injustice, and intolerance. Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the



Special Olympics movement has grown to more than 5.6 million athletes and Unified partners in 172 countries. With the support of more than 1 million coaches and volunteers, Special Olympics delivers 32 Olympic-type sports and over 108,000 games and competitions throughout the year. Special Olympics is supported by many individuals, foundations, and partners. To see a full list of partners click [here](#).

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