

SPORT FOR GENDER EQUALITY: THE POTENTIAL OF SPORT FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION RECOGNISED DURING THE FRENCH MINISTRY OF EUROPE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS' 2020 WEEK FOR EQUALITY

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On March 3rd 2020, after a morning centred around the attribution of the Simon Veil prize to Maribel Montenegro - a member of the Mexican feminist organisation *Vivas nos queremos* - with the presence of Foreign Affairs Minister, Jean-Yves le Drian, and Secretary of Equality between Men and Women, Marlène Schiappa, sport was enhanced as a tool for promoting gender equality and social inclusion during the second half of the day.

Indeed, the round table entitled “International strategies for equality between women and men: How does France make a difference on the field ?” was organised around the intervention of six speakers – two of whom were involved in sport-related non-governmental organisations – and a testimony from Laurence Fischer, the ambassador for sport at the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and founder of the organisation *Fight for Dignity*¹.

Laurence Fischer, also three-time world champion of karate, emphasised the need for women victims of physical violence to regain control of their bodies. Sport can enhance women to earn their self-worth and body-control back, she declared. Affected by meetings with Doctor Denis Mukwege – who received the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize for his engagement with women sexually and physically abused in the Democratic Republic of Congo – and survivors, she argued that the victims’ healing process, towards reinsertion in mainstream society, could go through the practice of sport. Her message was clear: sport has the potential to help vulnerable women. Concretely, and in addition to Laurence Fischer’s actions on the field, the French diplomatic network for the support of women is also working on bringing back good practices from other countries on the matter.

¹ Official website : <https://www.fightfordignity.net/>

An example of good practice for gender equality through sport, was that of the organisation *Terres en Mêlées*², which promotes rugby as an educational tool. Pierre Gony, its founder, discussed his ongoing project in Madagascar where girls, alongside boys, are encouraged to practise rugby as a school sport. Whereas the ultimate goal of the organisation is to spread the practice of rugby in order to promote its educational values, it also considers sport as a tool for improving self-worth and self-confidence. Through the diffusion of the documentary *La jeune fille au ballon ovale* (The young girl with an oval ball) in 2017, Gony aimed at popularising his organisation and ongoing projects. It is necessary, he explained, that such projects are talked about for them to be replicated elsewhere.

Representing Plan International France, a network organisation supporting children and promoting gender equality between girls and boys, Michelle Perrot provided a brief overview of an upcoming project built in conjunction with *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD) and *FIFA*, which will use football to promote the empowerment of girls in Benin, Guinea and Togo. She explained that, for years, Plan International has used sport as a symbolic means for the fight against gender stereotypes.

These interventions on citizen diplomacy and sport, during this week devoted to gender equality more generally, confirmed the Ministry's recognition of sport as a tool for social inclusion – including that of women – in civil society. More discussions are to come as sport, it was confirmed, would be a topic of conversation during the upcoming United Nation's Generation Equality Forum held in Paris in July 2020. ■



² Official website: <http://terres-en-melees.com/>

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