FIFA PRESIDENT’S ADDRESS

SPECIAL SESSION ON ‘SAFEGUARDING SPORT FROM CORRUPTION’ AT THE MARGINS OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL SESSION ON CORRUPTION

Wednesday, 2 June 2021
Dear UN Member State representatives,
Dear UNODC Executive Director, Ms Waly,
Dear Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Quickenborne,
Dear President of the IOC, dear Thomas,
Dear excellencies, distinguished delegates,
Dear allies in combatting corruption,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I extend my gratitude to you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of FIFA at this special session on ‘Safeguarding Sport from Corruption’, within the margins of the UN General Assembly Special Session on Corruption.

In February 2020, I published the Vision 2020-2023, which carries the overall objective of making football truly global. This was a strategy for not only the organisation, but for football as a whole, in all parts of the world.

We have tasked ourselves to truly globalise football - benefitting players, coaches, stakeholders, teams, clubs and organisations from around the globe, involved in the sport.

Our goal is to make football more inclusive, to modernise the sport – especially in areas such as youth and women’s competitions – and in the future to have at least 50 national teams and 50 clubs from all continents competing at the top level. Both at men’s and women’s level.

We plan to develop more inclusive formats of our global competitions and the creation of more opportunities for FIFA member associations to successfully bid for, and host, tournaments.

We must have bidding processes that are fully transparent, have clear evaluation criteria and abide by ethical principles, as well as the allocation of FIFA World Cup and FIFA Women’s World Cup hosts voted on by the FIFA Congress. This has already been the case for the FIFA World Cup in 2026 in the United States, Canada and Mexico, and will be the process followed for the first time in the selection of the hosts for the next FIFA Women’s World Cup.

We must prioritise the delivery of sustainable women’s tournaments; promote the importance of, and help member associations to foster, strong legacy; and increase grassroots and participation programmes around the world.

Yet, while boosting participation, evolving our competitions and promoting global football activities are key to sustainable football, we must do so with integrity at the heart of these actions.

FIFA’s core values are found in the organisation’s pillars of good governance – based on the comprehensive set of governance reforms introduced in 2016 - safeguarding football from corruption, protecting all participants, especially children and vulnerable adults, positively impacting society through the power of football – and integrity.

But why are these principles so important? What are the threats to our sport?
The new FIFA has learned from its past experiences, which showed how sport organisations can be severely impacted by corruption and rent-seeking behaviours of individuals – unless appropriate checks and balances are fully in place, correctly implemented and frequently initiated.

We must ensure that funding, such as through the FIFA Forward Development Programme and the FIFA COVID-19 Relief Plan, an unprecedented 1.5 billion dollar fund to support our 211 member associations and six confederations, cannot be misused.

Therefore, we have established a robust financial governance mechanism, requiring each member association to provide audited financial statements.

In addition, the FIFA Forward Development Funds undergo a separate and detailed review by independent external auditors and members must agree to contractual obligations.

When FIFA established the COVID-19 Relief Plan Steering Committee, it was headed by Olli Rehn – a member of the Governing Council of the European Central Bank and a former Vice-President of the European Commission – in order to oversee the operation of the plan precisely in line with our governance principles.

Match manipulation, while relatively uncommon, carries a devastating impact upon the integrity of the game, competitions and teams. Football is the largest sport by betting volume, holding around a 50% share of the total market and producing a global turnover of over EUR 600 billion every year.

Out of the roughly 36,000 football matches monitored by FIFA every year, an average of 0.4%, or 150 matches, are flagged as attracting suspicious betting patterns. For us, that is 150 matches too many, but added to this, the economic consequences of the pandemic have made it easier for criminals to prey on vulnerable individuals, involved in football, and to incentivise match manipulation.

The signing, in September 2020, of a Memorandum of Understanding with UNODC illustrates our commitment to the protection of sports integrity.

Our partnership, within the past nine months, has demonstrated a great motivation and ambition to work together. FIFA has contributed to the UNODC workshops on safeguarding sport from corruption, sharing knowledge with law enforcement and criminal justice representatives, financial investigation units, anti-corruption authorities and national sport federations.

Furthermore, at the occasion of the International Anti-Corruption Day, the UNODC and FIFA joined forces for a new integrity campaign to encourage players, coaches and officials to recognise, resist and report instances of match-fixing.

The launch of FIFA’s Global Integrity Programme, developed in partnership with the UNODC, has been a milestone in our commitment to this cause. This programme aims to provide integrity officers of all of FIFA’s 211 member associations with an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of match manipulation and measures to tackle it effectively.
It kicked off with the first edition dedicated to all member associations affiliated to the Asian Football Confederation in March, and for the South American football confederation in April. Editions for the remaining four confederations will take place later this year, respectively in 2022.

Apart from awareness raising and capacity-building, FIFA is very active in prosecuting match manipulation cases in the context of its competitions. Since 2017, FIFA has successfully concluded 25 investigations into match-fixing and sanctioned 24 individuals and one club.

The International Transfer System must also be fit for purpose. The total value of international transfers in 2019 totalled over USD 7 billion, 5.8% more than in 2018. This means, commissions paid to football agents increased, but sat at around USD 700 million in December 2019, 19.3% higher than the full calendar year before, and only USD 70 million for training clubs.

A transfer market fuelled by speculation and not solidarity means a growing risk of conflicts of interest, huge market inflation and an increasing competitive imbalance.

In response, we have created the FIFA Clearing House, a central counterpart in charge of performing all required checks in player transfers, and ensuring the money paid by the purchasing club is correctly distributed to the training clubs in compliance with national and international financial regulations.

As football is not immune from financial crime, neither is it yet a completely safe space for everyone wishing to take part. Reports of harassment and abuse in sport have been increasing in recent years, often linked to abuse of authority by officials, or characterised through sexual abuse, used as the ‘currency’ of corruption.

Therefore, sports organisations need to have preventative safeguarding measures in place as well as appropriate means to respond to concerns or allegations.

FIFA has launched the Fifa Guardians Programme, consisting of a toolkit to build capacities of national football associations to help prevent any risk of harm to children and to appropriately respond if concerns arise, as well as the Fifa Guardians Safeguarding in Sport Diploma, a new global education programme designed to strengthen and professionalise safeguarding standards across football.

Moreover, through our partnership with the UNODC, we are leading discussions to potentially establish an independent, multi-sports, multi-government and multi-agency “international centre for safe sports” to help manage cases of abuse of children in sport.

Taking care of children and protecting young people also relates to fostering youth development, and to preventing our young people from being absorbed into damaging criminal activities - another pillar of our collaboration with the UNODC.

Football can be a vehicle to help address global challenges, with an emphasis upon education, the development of life skills and the preservation of the environment, the climate and the world we live in. Indeed, this approach complements the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Ultimately of significant importance in our discussions today, is ensuring integrity. Protecting football from corruption, crime and other, real, dangerous threats to its fabric, beauty and purity.
FIFA and our international allies, including the UNODC, continue to stand united in the fight against corruption, match manipulation and protecting children around the world.

Meanwhile, we have formalised further collaborations with the World Health Organization, UN Women, UNESCO, the World Food Programme, the Council of Europe, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and, earlier this week, with the Caribbean Community.

These partnerships have allowed us, for example, to extend the FIFA Integrity e-Learning Tutorial to all ASEAN member states, and to create the FIFA Women’s World Cup Integrity Task Force, to monitor suspicious activity potentially impacting upon the tournament.

FIFA continues to sit as a contributing stakeholder with the International Partnership against Corruption in Sport, the Group of States Against Corruption on the reform of the transfer system and the G20 Anti-Corruption Working Group.

Our global alliances are crucial to our capacity and ability to achieve the goals as laid out in FIFA’s Vision.

I wish to once again express my thanks to you all for your invaluable contributions into how we achieve a cleaner, and safer sport. We all look forward to further enhancing cooperation between sport organisations and public authorities with a view to our common endeavour to safeguard sport from corruption.