

Statement delivered during the 7th International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS VII), Baku, Azerbaijan, from 26 to 29 June 2023

The International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS), has, since its earliest days, played a major role in establishing the practice of physical education and sport as a fundamental right for all, including through the International Charter of Physical Education and Sport.

To ensure this important value is upheld, we must do our utmost to protect the rights of all those who wish to participate in physical education and grassroots sport, particularly when, through no fault of their own, they have been prevented from doing so. As of the 16th June, 317 Ukrainian athletes, sport coaches and physical athletes have been killed since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.¹ 363 sport facilities have been destroyed or damaged due to Russian bombing and shelling, including the iconic stadium, part of an Olympic sports training centre, in the city of Chernihiv, and the Altair ice arena in Druzhkivka.

Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression has devastated the infrastructure that delivers sport, physical education, and physical activity across Ukraine, and which contributes vitally to the health and wellbeing of the Ukrainian people. Children have seen their access to sport, exercise and physical education disrupted or suspended because of Russia's war of choice.

Overall, in the context of MINEPS VII, Russia's war of aggression represents an assault on the sport, physical education, and physical activity of Ukraine's people, and will have profound long-term impacts on their physical and mental health. Yet, we acknowledge too the remarkable resilience, dedication and ingenuity of many Ukrainians, in striving to maintain their sport practice, exercise, and physical education, in gyms, sport halls, schools, workplaces, homes, and other settings in these appalling circumstances.

As 41 Ministers and equivalent senior representatives for sport of our like-minded countries, we encourage the international sport community to continue to show its solidarity with the people of Ukraine, including through supporting the continuation, recovery, and reconstruction of Ukrainian sport where and when possible.

The Russian state must not be allowed to use sport to legitimise its illegal and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine, nor should the Belarusian state be able to use sport to legitimise its complicity in Russia's war of aggression. The Russian Federation should immediately stop its military aggression, cease its attacks on Ukraine, and withdraw all its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders, extending to its territorial waters.

This statement is given on behalf of the following countries: Albania, Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Cook Islands, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. (41)

¹ Date provided by the Ministry of Youth and Sport of Ukraine