



EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES

SKOPJE • MACEDONIA



Ambassador Paul D. Wohlers Remarks

Signing Ceremony “Social and Ethnic Integration through Sports”

Villa Vodno, Thursday, May 23, 2013 – 12:00

Dobar Den, Mirdita, Good afternoon -- President Ivanov, Mr. Anastasovski, Distinguished Mayors, honored guests, and friends. It is an honor for me to be here today to observe the signing of the Memorandum for Cooperation as part of the project for Social and Ethnic Integration through Sports, implemented by GLOBAL. Last year, I joined President Ivanov for several of GLOBAL’s initial projects, aimed at fostering tolerance and respect for others, regardless of race, class, or religion, through the universal language of sports.

The project was a huge success, and this year GLOBAL and its partners have gone even further, emphasizing the importance of sportsmanship and the spirit of fellowship between competing teams and their fans.

It is important to remember that no matter how skilled you are and no matter how much you practice, there will be no game or race if your opponent does not show up. Sportsmanship goes beyond playing fairly. Sportsmanship is respect for your opponent. For it is often when we are challenged by others, like our opponents, that we are able to grow the most as individuals.

In my experience, children sometimes understand this concept better than adults. I have had the honor of attending several of GLOBAL’s events before, and it was truly inspiring to see young people of different ethnicities, religions and cultural backgrounds coming together with their common love of sports, art and fun. When you put a group of kids together on a field with a ball, they aren’t going to stop to ask each other what religion they follow, or what their cultural background is. In fact, they really don’t even need to speak the same language. They just start kicking the ball around, playing together, and having a good time. Sports - like art and music – don’t require a specific language or background. It just requires a willingness to play together and appreciate each other.

I want to congratulate the staff of GLOBAL for their vision and the dedication that has made their past programs such a success, and also for the great strides they are making in promoting tolerance throughout Macedonia. Over the past year, GLOBAL has brought together thousands of boys and girls from around Macedonia to play football, develop their creativity and ingenuity through art projects, and to visit different cultural and religious sites across this country. And I want to thank the mayors of Aerodrom, Kavadarci, Valandovo, Tearce, Debar, Centar Zupa and Rosoman for their support and partnership in this program. Young people from areas far beyond these municipalities will benefit from the leadership these mayors are showing in building stronger and more tolerant communities.

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I would especially like to thank President Ivanov for continuously recognizing and supporting the importance of this initiative. The President has been a tireless champion for the young people of Macedonia, and his support for activities such as this one sends an important message to all citizens in Macedonia that there are many more things that unite us than divide us, and that understanding and tolerance can come from something as simple and as universal as sports.

The U.S. Embassy is proud to be part of this project for the second year in a row. We look forward to cooperating with each of you in the future, as we work together to bring the young people of Macedonia together, help them learn to respect every citizen of this country regardless of their background, and exercise good sportsmanship in all competitions.

Thank you.