

**Speech delivered by John Morrison to launch the 1.0 version of  
[www.megasportingevents.org](http://www.megasportingevents.org)**

**Instituto Ethos, Rio de Janeiro, 22 May 2014**

In a few weeks from now the cities of this vast country will be bursting with excitement as the world's finest footballers will demonstrate their skills to bring glory to their countries and themselves. The month-long Football World Cup is not only a major international event; it is the world's most widely-watched sports spectacle. When the matches are played, traffic stops in cities as far apart as Miami and Montevideo, Manchester and Monrovia, Muscat and Melbourne, Moscow and Medan. Only one team will emerge victorious, but hundreds of players representing 31 other countries will have given their best in this beautiful game.

Two years from now, thousands more athletes will come to this spectacular city, and aim to run faster, jump higher, and show that they are stronger than other athletes, as Rio de Janeiro stages Olympic Games. For sports fans, what Brazil will offer over the next two years is a magnificent feast.

The idea of sports represents some of the highest human ideals. Fair play is important, there are rules against cheating, and everyone strives for his or her best, unaided by anything but their strength and spirit, to prove how they are the finest athletes in their sport. It is competitive but rule-based; it is meaningless if it does not include everyone; and the biggest reward is often being part of the great adventure.

Mega sporting events like the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cups have massive potential for human rights good. In which an intricate web of public and private sector actors can play a critical role to benefit society.

Events like this are of course a magnet for campaign groups. But the Olympics in particular invites high expectations. They are linked in the public mind with high ideals, of harmony among nations, solidarity and fair play.

The benefits of Mega Sports Events are manifold. As well as the feel-good factor so often generated, the public and private investments associated with these events often stimulates more tangible benefits. They help among other

things to create jobs, improve infrastructure, develop housing and regenerate urban areas, and promote healthy lifestyles. The football World Cup in South Africa created 130,000 jobs. London's Olympic Park created 46,000 jobs. The Olympics in Athens created new public housing. Disused old industrial areas have been rejuvenated in Sydney and London. We are grateful for the support of the British government to allow us to maintain something of the legacy of London 2012, with the first version of the website we launch here today.

But these major events also have human rights impacts. The last year has shown increased global scrutiny towards Brazil, Russia and Qatar. Brazil witnessed massive demonstrations last year during the Confederations Cup, which weren't directly related to the mega-sporting events as such, but many demonstrators questioned the public expenditure. Cost overruns of the Sochi Olympics attracted global attention. Russia's treatment of sexual minorities created a global backlash. The deaths of many workers in the construction sector in Qatar have raised serious questions about worker safety and rights in the country.

Campaign groups have in the past spoken of forced eviction in New Delhi where the 2010 Commonwealth Games were staged, and there were evictions in Atlanta during the 1996 Olympics. There were also concerns over the treatment of migrant workers in Beijing and Sochi, besides Qatar, and unions have raised concerns about violation of workers' rights at many factories that manufacture sports goods or event merchandise. Sponsors too face scrutiny, as had happened to Dow Chemicals in London, because Dow acquired Union Carbide, whose pesticide plant in Bhopal, India, had an accident due to which thousands died thirty years ago. Moscow had placed drastic restrictions on freedoms to protest and express during the staging of the Olympics. Sponsoring companies spoke out against Russian treatment of sexual minorities in the lead-up to the Sochi winter Olympics.

The staging of a mega-sporting event will cast light on any host country, including its human rights record.

But the governing bodies are learning. The International Olympic Committee, for example, now emphasizes legacy and has intervened early when it believes human rights abuses may be taking place. Significant steps are also being taken to set a roadmap to ensure sustainability. FIFA, for its part, now requires football manufacturers to meet international labour standards and audit their factories.

I expect greater scrutiny of human rights as part of such events over the longer run, and the requirement of due diligence, to be on the agenda. London had a sustainability sourcing code and the cities of PyeongChang,

Rio de Janeiro, Sochi, and London, promised to uphold human rights during the London Olympics in 2012. Organisers at Glasgow, where Commonwealth Games will be held this year, have also declared a human rights policy.

The staging of a great sports event is a complex exercise. It requires logistics, speed, cost considerations, safety, and quality. The stadia have to be sturdy; the trains should run on time; and the experience should be pleasant for the participants and spectators.

Sport represents high ideals. We should therefore expect organizing bodies of the sports – FIFA in the case of football and the International Olympic Committee in the case of Olympic Games – to commit themselves to open, fair, and participative principles such as the following:

- It should be natural that the stadia should be built without serious accidents;
- that no force is used in moving people from their homes to other locations so that the event's infrastructure can be built;
- that people who wish to demonstrate politically or oppose the events peacefully have the space to do so;
- that the toys, T-shirts, and goods sold, to celebrate the event, are made by workers who are paid fair wages and children are not used in the manufacture;
- that the sports equipment used is made in a sustainable manner, without using children in the labour force;
- that the workers who build the infrastructure and provide services are treated with respect and dignity, and their right to bargain collectively and to fair living wages, are respected;
- that the city's residents are not inconvenienced and are able to carry on their day-to-day lives without massive disruption;
- and that the city's poor are able to benefit from the event by participating in it economically – by getting jobs, by being able to trade in the areas where spectators gather, and by getting access to the sites.

For over a year now, we at the Institute for Human Rights and Business have been researching the impact of mega-sporting events on human rights. These events are important contributors to economies by creating jobs and infrastructure. They attract sponsorship from the world's largest corporations. Organisers purchase goods and services from suppliers around the world and the events they stage are watched by millions around the world. Those who make these events possible are in a unique position to lay down norms and standards to ensure that every aspect is undertaken in a manner that respects human rights.

With that in mind, we researched the staging of such events in the past and plans for the future. Our aim was to understand the unique characteristics of each event and the common standards that needed to be applied to ensure respect for human rights. We looked closely at how London organized the Olympic Games in 2012 and how this year Glasgow would host the Commonwealth Games. We've also studied Brazil's approach to hosting the Football World Cup, and over the next few years, how Olympics will be staged in Rio and Tokyo, and football world cups in Russia and Qatar.

The motto of the Olympic Games is "*Citius, Altius, Fortius*", or "Faster, Higher, Stronger"; how could the organization of these events continue to strive towards perfection?

Last year we published the report, *Striving for Excellence – Mega Sporting Events and Human Rights*, which explored some of the global human rights risks and opportunities associated with these events. Our recent outreach in Brazil to better understand the human rights risks and opportunities there, and possibilities for future learning, is part of that.

Here in Brazil, we have been working with the support of the British Embassy to better understand the human rights risks and opportunities. We have met with representatives from Brazil's federal government and municipal governments, the Rio Olympic organisers, members of the business community, civil society, unions, academics and affected rights-holders. We held three multi-stakeholder workshops in Sao Paulo and Rio in January and March this year.

We have highlighted the importance of engaging affected communities, particularly those likely to be evicted as a result of preparations for major events. We have learned more about the importance of access to public spaces, particularly by small business owners and street traders. We have noted with regret the accidents that have occurred during construction, leading to at least seven fatalities in Brazil. We have listened to concerns about the competing centres of government power, which inevitably slows down decisions and sometimes complicates the orchestration of the event.

But we have also noted the steps the Rio 2016 Organising Committee has taken to tackle the issue of disability access. We are also aware of its supplier sourcing code and are encouraged to see that a complaints and dispute resolution mechanism is being developed. We are encouraged by the efforts of the Secretariat of Human Rights of the Presidency (SDH) to tackle risks of child exploitation around the World Cup, and the Ministry of Labour and Employment to promote decent work. Such steps are important signals of commitment to human rights that should be welcomed and encouraged.

We have now compiled our learning in a dynamic form – a website which will be updated regularly with the latest information on mega-sporting events and the multiple links to promoting and protecting human rights around the world.

Today we are proud to launch the website – [www.megasportingevents.org](http://www.megasportingevents.org) – initially in English with materials soon to come in Portuguese – and later in many other languages. Our aim is to provide a one-stop shop where businesses, governments, civil society groups, and those working in academia can better understand the key human rights risks associated with MSEs around the world, and have wider access to examples of emerging good human rights practice. Our hope is that the website will contribute to helping build a global solutions based legacy that all future events of this kind will benefit from. Indeed, to use the language of the Internet, this is Version 1.0, and more will follow.

The approach the website takes is to invite visitors to explore the issues through a series of questions such as: What are the key issues involved? How do the organisers and companies involved in MSEs operate? What principles must they bear in mind at each stage in the event life cycle? What criticisms might their conduct attract? How do they deal with challenges and solve problems? What standards do they apply and how are these standards monitored and improved over time? How can the next event be better?

We should of course also remember that the human rights issues involved with the staging of a mega-sporting event are not necessarily unique. Land gets acquired and people have to move for many projects, large and small. Workers have to work on tight deadlines. Goods have to be produced as per schedule. Roads have to be built and trains have to run. But in particular with respect to major sporting events, if force is used, if practices are discriminatory, if workers' rights are violated, if workers suffer from ill-health, or die in accidents, if local neighbourhoods suffer inordinately, if restrictions are placed on poor, marginalized, and vulnerable communities, and if children are used in manufacturing products or providing services, then not only are laws violated, but also the spirit of the games. It affects the reputation of sponsors, the builders, the city, and the event itself.

These human rights issues indeed apply in many contexts. What the mega-sporting event does is offer a unique lens to examine the interplay of rights with the staging of the event, to ensure that all affected parties are protected, and all parties involved respect rights.

We clearly don't have all the answers to the many complex challenges involved. But we have talked extensively to all interested parties, and listened carefully, to highlight the critical issues. The new website we are launching today will remain a work-in-progress – we will continue to add new material to

it as we learn more, as more experiences are formed, and as better practices evolve. And we invite all of you who have experiences in this area to share your knowledge and views with us.

Our project is not meant to single out any specific event, city or country. We believe every city, which has been selected to stage such an event has something new to teach its successors, and our aim is to catalogue the experiences so that best-practices are accessible and visible; so that mistakes are not made or repeated.

It is of course impossible to eliminate the human rights risks associated with MSEs entirely, but it is possible to start to put systems in place to mitigate those risks better and more consistently.

This is a process of learning for all concerned – organizers, sponsors, governments, suppliers and local people alike. But rather like athletes training for an Olympic event, the sooner a new host, or candidate city, can get started with addressing their human rights challenges, the greater the chances of success will be. And this is one sport where everyone can deservedly be a winner.

Thank you to you all and especially to all our partners here in Brazil and to Ethos for this excellent event.