

WORKING SESSION 3: SPORTING EVENTS AS CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES AND
THE ROLE OF SPORT IN THE PROMOTION OF INTEGRATION AND EQUALTY

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The Alliance Defense Fund [ADF] would like to thank the ODIHR-OSCE for putting on its agenda this very important topic; one which has so much potential for positive results both culturally and in the process of promoting equality and tolerance. ADF would like to point out the very positive role religious belief has played in sporting events as has been evidenced most recently in American sports with Christian players like Tim Tebow and Jeremy Lin becoming cultural icons in large part because of their openness about their faith. On Easter Sunday, Tebow in fact delivered a sermon at a church in Texas to over 15, 000 people who came to listen to the sports phenomenon. Terms like “Tebowing”, a motion whereby one gets on one knee and prays, and “Linsanity” have swept the United States.

Perhaps the most positive outcome of the success of players like Lin and Tebow is that they have sparked a cultural debate about Christianity in the United States which has had far reaching implications in many different parts of society. People have been given something positive and good to believe in and it has brought fun back into sports with true “good guys” to root for. The positive nature of what these players represent will hopefully filter down to a concrete recognition of the importance of religion to society. Religious charities still represent the largest portion of social and welfare services in most countries in the world. Christians, as well as other religions, run orphanages, homeless shelters, adoption agencies, schools, hospitals and much much more. Governments would otherwise be crippled by the burden of having to pay for these much needed services provided to the most vulnerable members of society.

Another positive aspect of the emergence of people like Tebow and Lin has been their openness about sharing their faith with the public. We must recall that freedom of expression is not only a fundamental right; it is the right which in many emerging democracies has led to the change from dictatorship and oligarchy to democracy. Freedom of expression constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society, one of the basic conditions for its progress and for each individual’s self-fulfillment. The hallmarks of this freedom are broadmindedness, pluralism and tolerance. For a long time it has been argued by secularists that religious freedom is essentially the freedom *only* to believe (the so-called *forum internum*). Players like Tebow and Lin have evidenced the importance of recognizing that religious liberty also must include the freedom to publicly practice one’s beliefs (the so-called *forum externum*).

For this reason, the Alliance Defense Fund calls upon the OSCE to openly promote the positive aspect of religious belief in sport and culture as well as to adopt a proactive stance in supporting religious belief in both the *forum externum* as well as the *forum internum*.