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CONCACAF Sports Summit 2013 Kicks Off with Powerful Messages

Georgetown, Grand Cayman, October 21 2013 - CONCACAF'S landmark Sports Summit 2013 'Transformation through Partnership' got under way on Monday with a gala dinner and welcome from President Jeffrey Webb and key guest speakers.

"The beautiful game delights people of all creeds and backgrounds," said President Webb in his welcome speech to guests. "Football builds character, it unites nations, it instills a sense of life-long friendship, it provides discipline and team work. It induces national pride, a sense of accomplishment and generates global exposure. In its utmost complexity, it can be perceived both as an art form and as a road to hope," added Webb.

The central theme of transformation was superbly captured by the dinner's keynote speaker from South Africa, Tokyo Sexwale.

Sexwale told of his time as a political prisoner in an isolation cell on Robben Island, where he was held along with Nelson Mandela and other leading figures in the struggle against the country's apartheid regime.

Sexwale recounted how he and other prisoners kept their spirits up by playing football inside the notorious jail and even formed their own football association, "it was one of the key activities that kept us together, body and soul," he said.

"It enabled us to transcend political barriers amongst prisoners including cultural, linguistic, regional, ethnic differences that we had. We could all come together and forget our differences," said Sexwale who encouraged Webb in his role as chairman of FIFA's Anti-Racism and Discrimination Task Force.

The CONCACAF President has already begun to make an impact in the field of social advocacy and the importance of his role was given a prestigious acknowledgment by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

At the dinner, it was announced by UNAIDS Senior Adviser, Dr. Djibril Diallo, that President Webb

has been handed the 2013 UNAIDS "Protect the Goal" Special Award for the Diaspora.

Also present at the dinner was FIFA President Joseph Blatter, who on Tuesday will deliver one of the keynote speeches looking at 'The Power of Football'.

A wide range of themes will be addressed in speeches and panel discussions with a session on 'Football's Positive Impact on Society' looking at success stories where the game has been used as a tool for positive change and 'Football in Your Economy' looking at the commercial benefits the game can bring.

A key element of the summit is the involvement of governments from across the CONCACAF region and The Most Honorable Portia Simpson-Miller, Prime Minister of Jamaica, will address delegates about 'Sport and Country'.

CONCACAF's federations will also get in an insight into the workings of two of the most successful professional leagues with Nic Coward, General Secretary of the English Premier League and Don Garber, Commissioner of Major League Soccer both offering their insights.

The women's game is essential to CONCACAF's plans for growth and development and Victor Montagliani, President of the Canadian Soccer Association, will be outlining exciting plans for the FIFA Women's World Cup, which will be held in Canada in 2015.

The 2022 men's World Cup, which will be held in Qatar, is also represented on the agenda with Hassan Abdullah Al-Thawadi, Secretary General of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Supreme Committee, looking ahead to hosting the game's biggest event, for the first time in the Middle East.

Former players from the region will also give their perspectives – ex-Manchester United and Trinidad and Tobago striker Dwight Yorke and former United States national team forward Cobi Jones are among the players contributing to a panel discussion.

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