FOR ISF, GENDER EQUALITY IS A PRIORITY

MESSAGE OF THE ISF PRESIDENT

MESSAGE OF THE ISF GENDER EQUALITY COMMITTEE CHAIR

PRESENTATION OF ISF SHE RUNS - ACTIVE GIRLS’ LEAD 2021 PROJECT

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Actions and initiatives concerning gender equality are a priority for a federation that targets school students involved in sport. Indeed, for the ISF, becoming an active and responsible citizen implies that respect for others, and equality between people be conceived as transversal education policies which find a natural platform for concrete application in school sport. This is how the ISF includes these activities, in accordance with the recommendations of the International Olympic Committee on this topic and through the fifth sustainable development goal of the United Nations, «Gender Equality».

Since its founding, the ISF has managed to consolidate a high participation of young girls in sporting events throughout its history. Since 2018, this policy has been strongly pursued and is focused on three axes. The creation of a Gender Equality Committee, a greater presence of women in management structures, and the development of events intended only for young girls.


Based on this significant achievement, and wishing to continue to develop this policy, the members of the ISF who gathered at the General Assembly in March 2020 in Belgrade (Serbia), endorsed our proposal to mandate Ms. Valérie Lebondo (Gabon), to establish the roadmap for the Gender Equality Committee. This
is a first for ISF, for two reasons since no other African representative has ever held such a position within our organisation. This commission will allow the ISF to integrate a larger number of experts in the field, and at the same time generate or strengthen, depending on local situations, such initiatives within its 129 member countries. This is essential, since it is the members who nominate candidates for the various ISF positions.

Regarding the members of the ISF family, there are currently 48 positions held by women out of the 171 existing among the various committees and commissions of our organisation. Three of the nine ISF committees are chaired by women, which are Athletes and Youth, Integrity and Gender Equality. The Athletes and Youth Committee is composed mainly of women and chaired by Julia Boyanova (Bulgaria), who is also a member of the Executive Committee, with her colleague Sophie Bordet (Peru), elected to the Executive Committee in 2020, chairing the newly created Integrity Committee.

In sports management, ten women are chairpersons or coordinators in charge of one of the thirty sport commissions in the ISF programme. Among these, seven have been appointed since 2018, allowing countries such as the Philippines, Peru, Poland, Serbia, and Ukraine to occupy such positions of responsibility within the ISF for the first time.

Lastly, the first non-competitive event created by the ISF, is called “She Runs – Active Girls’ Lead”, which focuses on empowering young girls through sport activities and the development of entrepreneurial and leadership skills, exclusively dedicated for young girls. This allows them to meet high-level sportswomen, consolidate their networks by meeting other young girls involved in school sports clubs, and participate in seminars on project management and implementation. The first edition of this unique event among international sports federations, supported by the European Commission, took place in Paris (France) in 2019. The next edition will take place in Brussels (Belgium) from 27 September to 2 October 2021. The inaugural edition saw 500 representatives from ISF members participate in activities over five days and were joined by 2000 local French students. Indeed, this event is intended to be an opportunity to integrate as much as possible the schools of the host country of the event and promote personal exchanges between participants.

By celebrating International Women's Day, ISF continues to create an environment favourable to the ever-greater inclusion of women in its activities and bodies, through a multi-level and multi-scale approach. The decisions we have taken in this area in recent years impact the totality of activities and all members of our federation. This policy is manifested by adapting sports regulations, promoting participation in activities and different opportunities, by creating specific events and bodies and by developing cooperation with international sports and specialised institutions. To prepare for the future of our young people especially during this sanitary crisis the world is facing, we must use all available levers to have even more inclusive organisations within which the presence of women is no longer discussed but guaranteed; this is the commitment of the ISF. Best displayed through “She Runs - Active Girls’ Lead”.

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EDUCATION THROUGH SPORT HAS PROVEN TO BE EFFECTIVE ACROSS EDUCATION SYSTEMS AROUND THE WORLD.

**Therefore, the International School Sport Federation (ISF), whilst developing partnerships with other organisations that pursue the same objectives, is working to ensure there is leadership in the education of young girls today, becoming the women of tomorrow.**

Regarding the world of sport, in particular school sport, the 2021 edition of International Women’s Day with this year’s sub-theme: «Female leadership: For an egalitarian future in the world of COVID-19», underlined the central role of school sport during this global health crisis.

Indeed, the promotion of equality is a reality in the majority of ISF member countries. **For us, with the guidance of the ISF gender committee, it is a question of using school sport to further strengthen female leadership, to transmit to population of youth the values of equality and respect for others.**

Let’s make 2021 be a difference for women and girls in all countries, from school and through school sport!

**How do you see the impact of your position in ISF, for girls?**

It is a great honour for me to be involved in the ISF on the topic of gender equality. The evolution of school sport around the world has for some time demonstrated an awareness of the importance of the gender approach and involving women more and more in the process of developing school sport worldwide.

Personally, I would like to present my action whilst remaining mindful of the current global health crisis of COVID-19, by opening new avenues to stimulate school sport for women in its broad acceptance, as school sport is a favourable platform for its global development.

In this context, the desired impact is to make the participation of girls, women,
and female leaders more and more visible within the various operations, to promote school sport. Naturally, this social responsibility approach takes on a strategic dimension for me, in the globalisation of women’s skills that school sport greatly needs for the implementation of its new vision.

- **What is the message you would like to address to young girls on the importance of practicing school sport?**

I would tell them that school sport is in fact, the response of society to the need for the school community to flourish, in our current societies of growing cultural complexity. Its main mission is to provide opportunities for personal development of students, teachers, and leaders. The famous maxim which advocates a «healthy mind in a healthy body» is a globalising concept which integrates into the term school sport. All physical activity assembles as a support for the development of cerebral, motor, and bodily activity. By extension the school sport entities becomes a space of sports citizenship which plays an essential role in the training of future adults, of which society greatly needs.

- **In your opinion, how important are international sport events for the youth population?**

If we consider that sport events are good for the overall development of young girls through inter-school exchanges, proven by the engagement they provide, they also represent an excellent opportunity for them to join a sport project at school where the concept of representation constitutes a rewarding factor. From this, the student feels a sense of recognition from their school community, in part due to their sporting success but also from the relationships that are created during the competitions which extend well beyond education.

- **How did you manage in your sport environment (schools, club, federations...) through the COVID-19 situation, specifically for girls and what are the specific challenges for them?**

Gabon in its response plan against COVID-19 suspended the practice of mass physical and sports activities at school and in competitions until December 2020. January saw the return of physical activity at school with PE lessons in only one discipline (Athletics) along with jumping activities and lessons.

- **About Valérie Lebondo**

From Gabon, Valérie Lebondo is the Gabonese national representative and Gender Equality Committee Chair of the ISF. Having studied at the University of Omar Bongo, and the Institute of Youth and Sport of Gabon, Valérie spent five years teaching PE at a high school in the capital city, where she was the head of department, and was responsible for several sports clubs. In 2014 she entered the National School of Administration of Gabon, becoming a school and university administrator. In 2017 she was then appointed the Deputy General Director of School Works for the Education Ministry of Gabon. 2018 saw the affiliation of Gabon to the ISF, of which she is the representative to the ISF General Assemblies and board member of the African School Sport Federation. This was followed by the appointment of Valérie as ISF Gender Equality Committee Chair in 2020.