A new and powerful weapon has been introduced in the fight against doping with the International Convention on Doping adopted by the UNESCO’s General Conference in October 2005. That was the message from Paul Marriott-Lloyd, programme specialist at UNESCO, who spoke at Play the Game about the implications of the new convention.

The main purpose of the convention is to provide a legal framework for national governments to take actions to remove doping from sport – and indeed encourage them to do so. This is important, according to Marriott-Lloyd, because there are many areas in which only governments have the means to take on the fight against doping, particularly when it comes to counteracting production, distribution, and trafficking of drugs.

An end to availability of drugs
The convention contains specific obligations for governments, but also provides flexibility in the approaches they can take to put it into effect. One of the most important obligations is that governments must take action to restrict the availability of prohibited substances in order to restrict their use in sport. These include measures against production, importation, distribution, sale and trafficking.

Measures must also be taken against coaching and medical personnel complicit in doping offences. And moreover, the governments should support testing programmes consistent with the World Anti-Doping Code. Although this might prove costly for small states, Marriott-Lloyd believed that there are some good opportunities in cooperating with other countries to share both the expertise and the cost.

Finally, the Convention also encourages education on anti-doping as well as close cooperation between the anti-doping organizations, the public authorities and the sports organizations, something that was heavily demanded in other parts of the doping debate at Play the Game 2005.

Ratification is near
Marriott-Lloyd ended his presentation by emphasizing the importance of the strong implementation of the Convention by governments around the world for it to be effective.

The adoption of the convention marks a new phase in anti-doping. A phase where all of the governments of the world work within their considerable spheres of influence to remove doping from sport. The International Convention against Doping in Sport provides the framework for this to take place. However, it needs the forceful application by governments to ensure that these are not simply words without actions,” he said.

The original aim of UNESCO was to have the convention ratified in time for the Winter Olympics in Turin. However, this proved too optimistic as only a few countries had ratified the Convention at that time. 30 states need to ratify it for it to become effective.

The new target for UNESCO is May 2006, and the organization firmly believes in this because it has already set the date – July 20-21 – for the so-called “Conference of parties”, a sort of founding convention.

"I have told my colleagues here in Zambia that my experience at the conference has put me 5 years ahead with all the information compared to my friends who will know or never know what will happen until 5 years.”
Edgar Musonda, project leader, Sports Coaches Outreach, Zambia

A new UNESCO convention on doping strengthens the capacity of governments everywhere to act on the availability of doping drugs.

UNESCO JOINS FIGHT AGAINST DOPING IN SPORT
New convention demands that governments take action too

by Kasper Lindberg

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Greek weightlifter Leonidas Sampanis was stripped of a bronze medal at the Athens Olympics after a doping offense. Photo credit: Polfoto

For a six-year old, WADA has made tremendous progress but major challenges still lie ahead in the struggle to rid sport of doping. Both the progress and the challenges were elucidated in the WADA session of Play the Game 2005.

WADA Director General David Howman provided an update for the first six years of the World Anti-Doping Agency and the obstacles already overcome.

Much of the work so far has centred on the drafting, adoption, and implementation of the World Anti-Doping Code, which entered into force on January 1, 2004 and has been the framework of WADA’s work since then.

The big challenge has been to get all the sport federations and governments to accept the code. The sports did so by the time of the Athens Olympics 2004 but the nations of the world have proved more difficult.

“We don’t have all governments committed but we do have an international treaty which is remarkable. Normally it takes between 8 and 12 years. This took less than two years. We claim it as a world record,” David Howman said.

However, he was under no illusion about the difficulty of the fight against doping, and he went on to outline some of the tasks ahead. Among the important responsibilities of WADA is continued research and revision of the prohibited list, the education of athletes around the world, and the support of new national and regional anti-doping agencies, plus of course the monitoring of compliance with the code, both among sport federations and governments.

Over and over, Howman stressed the progress made during the first two years of work within the framework of the World Anti-Doping Code, and he firmly believes that the fight against doping will keep swinging towards the “good guys”.

“Cheats have prospered in the past. They must not in the future. Cheats should not deny clean athletes medals and glory,” said WADA’s Director General.

Obstacles to good testing

However, Norwegian professor Sigmund Loland tempered the enthusiasm of WADA’s Director General by presenting some of the factors that may still allow some cheats to prosper.

His presentation was an extract of an extensive research project into the efficiency of doping control procedures. Financed by Anti Doping Norway and supported by WADA, the project’s purpose was to identify elements of best practice and determine how to optimize efficiency in worldwide doping controls.

And certainly, there are serious obstacles in obtaining efficient, objective test results with the methods used today.

For instance, worldwide testing is hindered by the fact that there are only 20 national anti-doping agencies around the world – out of 90 in all – that can be characterized as well-functioning organisations. Moreover, poor cooperation between the anti-doping agencies and the sport federations often stands in the way of effective controls.

Loland also emphasized the importance of full independence of the anti-doping organizations from both the government and the sport federations. Other conclusions of the project was that no-advance testing should be prioritized and that there was a need for clearer definitions of all testing procedures.

If nothing else, the address of the Norwegian professor certainly proved that for WADA, establishing efficient worldwide testing is a test in itself.