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South Africa chasing gold at the Special Olympics World Winter Games

***World Games featuring 3,300 Athletes to be held in PyeongChang, Korea
29 January – 5 February 2013***

Johannesburg - Team **South Africa** is preparing to compete in the upcoming Special Olympics World Winter Games to be held 29 January – 5 February 2013 in PyeongChang, Korea – the same city that will play host to the 2018 Winter Olympic Games. Team South Africa comprises 1 floor hockey team, and 4 figure skaters, and will be hoping to repeat the performance of the 2009 team that brought home gold in their division.

The Special Olympics World Winter Games will bring together 3,300 athletes and coaches representing 112 countries and an additional 15,000 volunteers, families and fans. The Games will feature 8 Olympic-type sports including Alpine Ski-ing, Cross-Country Ski-ing, Snow Boarding, Snow shoeing, Short Track Speed Skating, Figure Skating, Floor Hockey and a demonstration of the growing sport of Floor Ball. Aside from the high quality sports competitions, the Games will also include a Host Town program, Law Enforcement Torch Run, a Global Youth Activation Summit, impressive Opening and Closing ceremonies and a Global Development Summit featuring more than 300 world leaders committed to supporting more inclusive and equitable policies and resources for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

2013 Special Olympics World Winter Games / PyeongChang, South Korea / 29 January – 5 February 2013 /
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Special Olympics South Africa

Created by the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation for the Benefit of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities.



The South African delegation comprising 13 floor hockey athletes from Vhembe in Limpopo, 2 figure skaters from Durban and 2 from Johannesburg will congregate in Johannesburg from 19 January for their final training camp before their departure on 25 January from OR Tambo International airport. Members of the public and media are invited to meet and support these athletes prior to departure and share in their stories of triumph and perseverance that have secured their places in the delegation. The floor hockey team will be training daily at the Hamlet Foundation from 19-24 January between 9h30 – 16h00 whilst the figure skaters will be stationed at the Northgate Ice Rink each morning between 9-10am.

Each Special Olympics athlete has a story of difficulty and exclusion as a result of their intellectual disability, but more importantly, a story of accomplishment and pride as a result of their achievements on the sports field. This is especially true for figure skater Kenneth Mokabo who joined Casa do Sol School in 2006 with speech and learning difficulties as a result of his microcephaly. He was introduced to figure skating as a part of their gross motor training program. Kenneth took to the ice like a fish to water and advanced from the provincial to national games and ultimately, selection to the South African team. At only 15 years of age, this young star will experience for the first time what it is to fly in an airplane, experience a foreign country and culture, and compete at World Games where athletes with intellectual disabilities are the stars of the show.

The floor hockey team from Limpopo too has triumphed despite their rural location and lack of resources. Using broom sticks, small classrooms and worn out sneakers, the floor hockey athletes from Grace and Love Special School in Vhufuli have demonstrated that South Africa is rich in talent and commitment. The support from Vhembe District Municipality and Thulamela Municipality for the expansion of Special Olympics programs in their jurisdiction, and especially for the selected team, have resulted in the unearthing of this talent, and will hopefully culminate in their triumph at the Games.

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In preparation for their departure, Special Olympics South Africa Chairman Dr Mathews Phosa, offered words of support for the team.

“Every time these athletes step on to the court or the ice, they remind us not of their intellectual disability, but of their countless abilities to persevere, overcome obstacles and excel. We wish them every success at the 2013 Special Olympics World Winter Games and know that they have the support of the South African public behind them.”

South Africa will also be represented by 2 youth from the North West Province who will partake in the Global Youth Activation Summit having participated in last year’s Africa Youth Summit during the Special Olympics Africa Unity Cup hosted by Royal Bafokeng Sports. The 2 boys from Tebogo Special School and Lebone II College will share their stories of how they are making their community more inclusive and how youth can take an active role in changing the attitudes and prejudices.

South Africa’s depth and experience in the sport of floor hockey and in athlete leadership has also been recognized with 3 Special Olympics athletes: Jimmy Masina, Quinton Jooste and Toni Pirie all having being selected to serve as officials at the Games.

“Their selection speaks volumes about our perseverance in trying to empower our athletes through sports and we are very proud that they have been selected to officiate at the World Winter Games,” said Special Olympics South Africa CEO, Annemarie van Wieringen.

Every two years, thousands of Special Olympics athletes worldwide come together to showcase their athletic skills and celebrate the spirit of Special Olympics. Alternating between Summer Games and Winter Games, Special Olympics World Games bring public attention to the talents and capabilities of people with intellectual disabilities, helping to change attitudes and break down barriers that excluded them from the mainstream of the community.

The first Special Olympic World Games took place in 1968 and since then have evolved into a world-class sporting event, attracting a wide range of sponsors, supporters and media. The last

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Special Olympics World Games were Summer Games held in Athens, Greece and the last Special Olympics World Winter Games took place in Boise, Idaho, USA in 2009.

For information about the upcoming Special Olympics World Winter Games, visit the Games' official website at www.2013sopoc.org

About Special Olympics:

Special Olympics is an international organization that changes lives through the power of sport by encouraging and empowering people with intellectual disabilities, promoting acceptance for all, and fostering communities of understanding and respect worldwide. Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the Special Olympics movement has grown from a few hundred athletes to more than 3.7 million athletes in over 170 countries in all regions of the world, providing year-round sports training, athletic competition and other related programs. Special Olympics now takes place every day, changing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities in places like China and from regions like the Middle East to the community playgrounds and ball fields in every small neighborhood's backyard. Special Olympics provides people with intellectual disabilities continuing opportunities to realize their potential, develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, and experience joy and friendship. Visit Special Olympics at www.specialolympics.org. Engage with us on: [Twitter @specialolympics](https://twitter.com/specialolympics); fb.com/specialolympics; youtube.com/specialolympicshq, and specialolympicsblog.wordpress.com.

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