



PRESS RELEASE

IOC gender equality, diversity and inclusion champions 2023

Jayanthi Kuru-Utumpala named Asia's Winner of the 2023 IOC Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champions Award

Colombo, March 12, 2024 – Jayanthi Kuru-Utumpala, the first person from Sri Lanka to reach the summit of Mount Everest, has come out on top as Asia's Winner of the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Champions Award for the year 2023.

Jayanthi Kuru-Utumpala is a women's rights activist with over 20 years of experience, and a rock climber / mountaineer for nearly as long. Her dedication to education is evident through her academic achievements, including a postgraduate diploma in women's studies and a Master of Arts degree in gender studies. Since her journey to Everest in 2016, she has been invited to deliver over 500 motivational speeches, to schools, universities, clubs, professional sports teams, associations, government and non-governmental organizations, corporate entities, as well as the military and police, in Sri Lanka and overseas. At each of these speaking engagements, while sharing her story of climbing Everest she draws out the gendered aspects of climbing Mount Everest and the need to challenge gender stereotypes and ensure gender equality, diversity and inclusion.

Together with two colleagues, Jayanthi co-founded Delete-Nothing, an online platform aiming to document instances of technology-related violence, particularly against girls, women, and queer and trans individuals in Sri Lanka. This initiative emphasizes the importance of recording such acts to facilitate further action. Jayanthi works as an independent consultant and she is currently the Gender and Human Rights Advisor at the Family Planning Association in Sri Lanka, working to address stigma and discrimination faced by people seeking HIV services. Notably, Jayanthi has been voluntarily conducting rock climbing workshops for women and girls over the past five years, which was a significant factor in her receiving this award.

Jayanthi was the inaugural Chairperson of the Complaints Committee of the SafeSport Policy in the National Olympic Committee (NOC) of Sri Lanka, and currently remains an active member of the Committee. Her expertise was recognized when she was invited as a panelist at the SafeSport event hosted by the Singapore NOC's "Women in Sport Committee's Webinar Series" in 2021.

In March 2019, Jayanthi was selected by the Sri Lankan Parliament as one of the 12 "Women Change Makers of Sri Lanka" in the sports category, as part of a campaign initiated by the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, the Sectoral Oversight Committee on Women and Gender, and USAID's Governance and Accountability project.

Mr. Maxwell de Silva, the Secretary-General of the National Olympic Committee of Sri Lanka, extended his congratulations to Jayanthi on receiving this prestigious award. He said, "*I'm personally happy that Jayanthi being the first Sri Lankan to conquer the Everest summit deserves this recognition from the IOC and made all of us proud.*" He emphasized her dedication to advancing crucial principles within the realm of sports as a source of immense pride for Sri Lanka. Jayanthi's unwavering commitment to breaking



barriers and fostering inclusivity serves as an inspiration not only to athletes but to the entire nation. This recognition reaffirms collective efforts towards promoting equality and diversity in sports, and the NOC stands behind Jayanthi as she continues to make impactful contributions to this important cause on a global scale.

Jayanthi shared her feelings on the winning of the Award, *“I’m honoured and humbled to receive this prestigious award. In order to ensure gender equality, diversity and inclusion, I believe that we all need to work together to challenge patriarchal stereotypes that prevent us from reaching our goals. For example, look at our public playgrounds and think about why we rarely see any girls playing sports in those spaces? How can we ensure that girls also have access to recreational sports? How much is being invested in women's sports? Definitely not enough. So, let’s break these patriarchal norms and create new norms that are based on equality, dignity and respect for each other, regardless of who we are and where we come from.”*

Katrina Adams, the former professional tennis player turned tennis executive from the USA, clinched the prestigious Global Award. Joining her in recognition are Irene Limika from Kenya for Africa, Marialoreto González Jaque from Chile for the Americas, Aurélie Bresson from France for Europe, and Patrick Johnson from Australia for Oceania, each honored with their Continental Awards.

For more information about the Awards, IOC’s full press release is available at www.olympic.lk/media/news/ioc-gender-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-champions-2023/

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