

## Azerbaijan

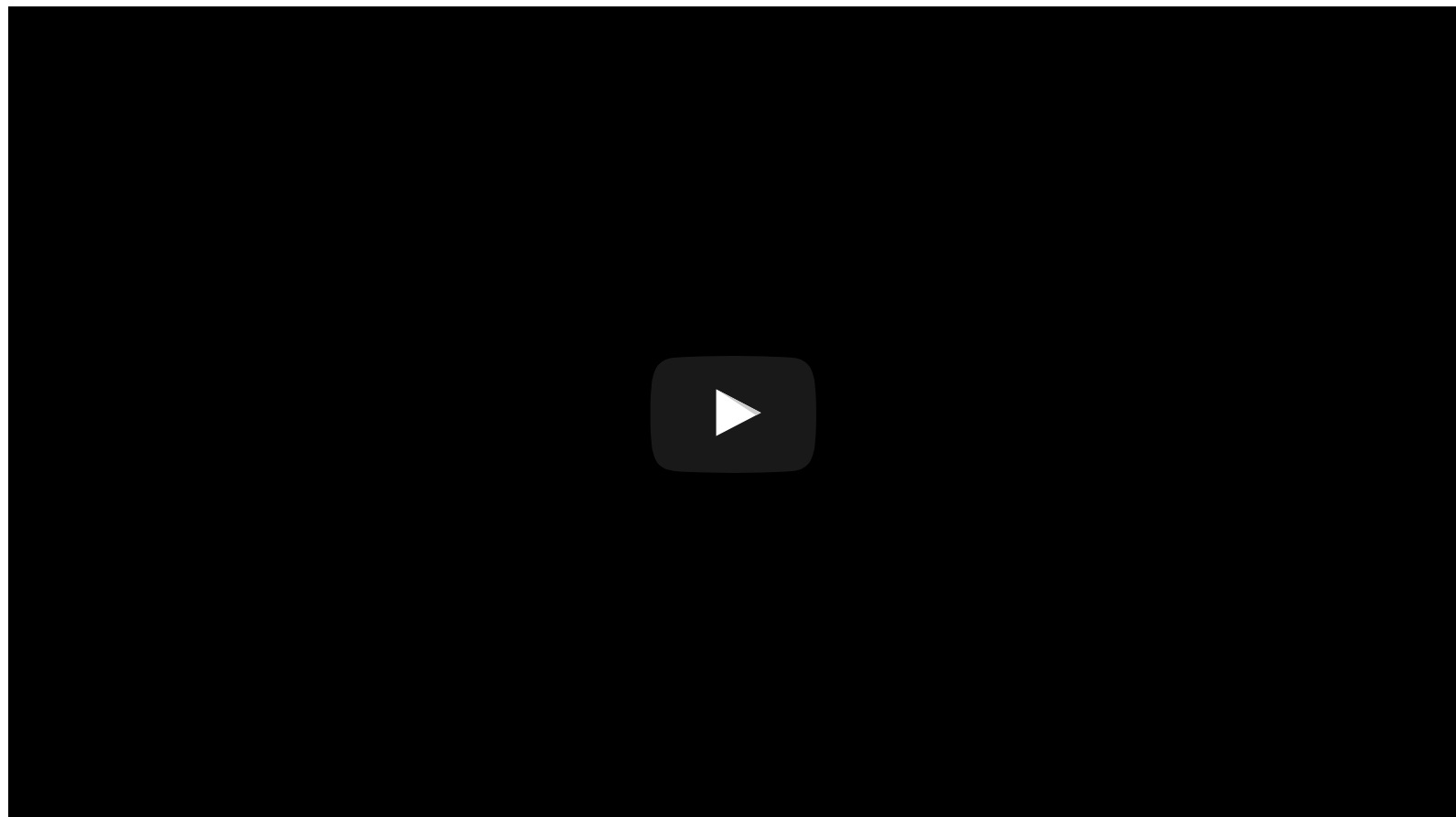
### In Azerbaijan, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Shakira meets with girl footballers to promote girls' development through education and sport

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The inaugural International Day of the Girl Child was 11 October 2012. For more information, click [here](#)<sup>44</sup>.

By Claudia Amico

BAKU, Azerbaijan, 15 October, 2012 – World-famous singer-songwriter and Goodwill Ambassador Shakira recently met with teenage footballers from a UNICEF-supported national girls' football league. She encouraged the athletes to inspire their peers to grasp their future, including through continuing to seek an education.



UNICEF correspondent Priyanka Pruthi reports on UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Shakira's recent visit to Azerbaijan. [Watch in RealPlayer](#)

said.

#### Encouraging girls to finish their education

Shakira joined an array of stars at the closing ceremony of the FIFA Under-17 Women's World Cup, speaking to the girls between rehearsals for her first solo concert in Baku.

The athletes were thrilled to meet the Colombian singer and share her passionate advocacy work for global education, calling for the expansion and improvement of education, especially for the most disadvantaged children and youth.

"The Government of Azerbaijan, as well as civil society in general, should work hand in hand to be able to guarantee that every child goes to school. No matter what gender – the boys or the girls, or no matter where do they live. The areas more problematic are rural areas, and so we need to focus on those areas," she said.

Shakira talked about how the players could harness their popularity and the power of football to encourage other girls to finish their education, particularly the poor and disadvantaged and those who might otherwise be married at a young age.

"Sport is a great tool to [help girls] socialize and also for the government, society in general, to keep these kids in school," she



#### Young athlete-ambassadors

Since 2011, UNICEF and national governing soccer body the Associations of Football Federations of Azerbaijan have worked together to promote girls' development, girls' taking control of their own lives and futures, including through education, an inclusive sport environment and girls' participation in sport.

Through the football programme, UNICEF teaches young footballers healthy lifestyles, life skills and child rights, and how to communicate them to their peers. Last year, seven teams were trained. The remaining 11 teams will be trained this year.

Armed with booklets and materials containing life-enhancing messages, teams travel to small rural towns and villages, engage local girls in a friendly football game and then sit and talk with them. Players and coaches discuss choices the girls make in their lives, including child marriage.

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Goodwill Ambassador Shakira recently met with teenage footballers in Azerbaijan. "Sport is a great tool...to keep these kids in school," she said.

#### Inclusive schools and sport, equal players in society

"It is an unfortunate fact that there are girls so dispirited with the education they are receiving, they really consider [it] better to get married or drop out or do something else than to complete the whole education. So, that's why UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Education to make sure schools are as inclusive as possible," says UNICEF Representative in Azerbaijan Mark Hereward.

At a cosy chat on Friday, Shakira sat surrounded by a circle of giggling girls. She listened to their experiences as role models and watched as they demonstrated their football talents. The players gave her a football signed by all.

Together, Shakira and these athletes are helping to promote girls in sport and in education so they can become equal players in society and achieve what they want to achieve.

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