



Jamaican athletes will once again be a force to reckon with on the world stage when they participate in the 2013 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, from January 29 to February 5.

The delegation, led by Glendon West, will be the largest ever to participate in the games for athletes with intellectual disabilities, over the past 30 years. The 18-member team will compete in floor hockey and figure skating.

Addressing a media briefing at the Alhambra Inn in Kingston on Wednesday (January 16), Minister without portfolio in the Office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for Sports, Hon. Natalie Neita-Headley lauded all of Jamaica's successes in sport during 2012.

"There really can be no competition, no sport, and no activity that better exemplifies true sportsmanship than what happens with Special Olympics. From the onset, the Special Olympics have helped to change attitudes and break down barriers that excluded people with intellectual disabilities from the mainstream of the community and from sport at its most competitive levels," she said.

Of the Jamaican team, the Minister pointed out that, "these young men and women are not to be taken lightly...they are true athletes that have spent enormous amounts of time training and honing their minds and spirits to meet the challenges of global competition."

She stated that other athletes could learn from the Special Olympics team, as they have shown that they can participate in a number of varying sporting disciplines. "Going to Rio 2016, I wish for the example shown here by the Special Olympics team, to be adopted by all Olympians and aspiring Olympians, that the sky is the limit," she stated.

Minister Neita-Headley noted that the National Sports Policy white paper, which has been

submitted to Cabinet, speaks specifically to Jamaica's commitment to sport for all citizens.

"I wholeheartedly embrace the principle that sport is a human right for all individuals, regardless of race, social class, gender, or disability," she told the gathering of athletes and other sporting interests.

Executive Director of Special Olympics Jamaica, Lorna Bell, said the Jamaicans, who will compete against athletes from 112 countries, will do so "in an atmosphere of acceptance and dignity, showing how they, through sports, bring justice, build acceptance and foster inclusion".

She encouraged all Jamaicans to support these special competitors with the same passion and interest shown all other sports and athletes. She said that for the first time, two members of the press will travel with the team, a move, which she said, is important in recognising and highlighting the accomplishments of the team.

The contingent is being sponsored by Digicel Jamaica, Puma, the Sports Development Foundation and Development Options Limited.

Every two years, thousands of special athletes from around the world gather to showcase their athletic skills across a number of sporting disciplines, and celebrate the spirit of the games at the Special Winter Olympics.

The games began in 1968, and in 1988 the International Olympics Committee (IOC) officially endorsed and recognised the Special Olympics.