

**58th Session of the Commission on Status of Women
United Nations, New York, 10-22 March 2014**

**Statement by Angela Ruggiero, Representative of the Permanent Observer for the
International Olympic Committee to the United Nations**

Mr Chairperson, Excellences, Distinguished Delegates,

The International Olympic Committee presents its compliments to the Commission on the Status of Women and appreciates this opportunity to contribute to assessing the challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. Although there has been steady progress toward equal access to education, gender inequality remains a disheartening fact of life for far too many women across the world.

The presentations we have heard since Monday all acknowledged the significant progress in pursuit of the MDGs, but equally recognize that there is much more to be done and serious challenges to face.

The International Olympic Committee is using sport to help change this sad reality. The UN has long recognized the link between gender equality and access to sport and physical activity.

The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women explicitly defends the right of women to “participate actively in sports and physical education.”

In 1995, the Platform for Action that emerged from the Fourth UN Conference on Women in Beijing referred to sport and physical activity as a mechanism to promote women’s health and combat discrimination in education, training and skills development.

Sport breaks down barriers and challenges gender norms.

Sport develops skills in management, negotiation and decision that empower women and girls to become leaders in the workplace, in the home and in all areas of community life. A survey of executive women found that 80 percent

played sports in their youth; 69 percent said sport contributed to their professional success.

The leadership talent of retired elite women athletes, with their inherent confidence, high standards, self-discipline and ability to overcome obstacles, has tremendous value for businesses, governments and non-governmental organisations.

Sport builds self-esteem and helps women take control over their lives. It gives adolescent girls a sense of ownership and respect for their bodies that encourages them to delay sexual activity and reduces levels of teen pregnancy.

Sport facilitates social inclusion and promotes physical and mental health. Physical activity improves concentration and academic performance. It provides opportunities for women and girls with disabilities to learn about health and develop social networks, leadership capabilities and other skills.

Sport benefits society by encouraging school attendance, discouraging adolescent risk behaviour and reducing public costs related to chronic and non-communicable disease, and mental health.

Sport offers inspiring role models. As such, the Olympic Games play an important role in challenging gender stereotypes by providing a global platform for talented women athletes. Women have participated in the Olympic Games since 1900, often in defiance of gender norms. Some returned home as sports heroes.

Today, women account for more than 40 percent of Games participants, and the IOC is committed to achieving parity. With the addition of women's boxing to the Olympic Programme at the 2012 London Games, women now compete in every sport at the Summer Games. The London Games also saw the first participation by women from Saudi Arabia, Brunei and Qatar, assuring that all 204 National Olympic Committees have included women in their delegations.

Women also played a prominent role in the recent Sochi Olympic Winter Games, with inspiring performances and increased participation possibilities in new events such as women's ski jumping, ski and snowboard slopestyle and ski halfpipe. The women's ice hockey final was one of the most popular competitions, attracting a huge global audience and sell-out crowd in Sochi's largest hockey arena.

The IOC's effort to use sport to promote gender equality and social development is not limited to the Olympic Games. It is a year-round global endeavour, often in conjunction with UN agencies and programmes and NGOs.

We support the Millennium Development Goals and the empowerment of women in multiple ways. The IOC's Women and Sport Commission actively promotes the participation of women in sport at all levels, from the field of play to the top administrative offices.

To raise awareness and share ideas at a global level, we regularly host a World Conference on Women and Sport administer the annual Women and Sport Awards. We will select six 2014 winners, all of whom have made tremendous contributions to gender equality in and through sport, from more than 30 strong candidatures from every region of the world.

We support training programmes to encourage self-empowerment and build leadership skills. We hold mentoring sessions to motivate and support women to stand for leadership elections.

We host media workshops to raise awareness of the importance of the media in achieving gender equality. We provide coaching and athletic scholarships, as well as degree programmes, to bring more women into the top ranks of sports administration.

At the Youth Olympic Games, we teach girls how to stand up against gender discrimination and harassment. We teach boys to respect girls as equals.

Attitudes about gender roles are deeply entrenched in many societies, and they will not be changed overnight.

It will require inspiring role models such as our Olympic Heroes. It will require action, agitation and determination by all who support this cause. It will have to continue to build on solid partnership across sectors. The International Olympic Committee is committed to this effort and is determined to play an active role in the post 2015 agenda. We cannot – we will not – be deterred by the challenges we face or bound by a calendar. We will continue to fight for progress until gender equality is a reality.

Thank for all you have done and all you will do in the future to advance this important cause. And thank you for giving me this opportunity to share the views and discuss the efforts of the International Olympic Committee.