Excellencies,
Royal Highnesses.
Mr Lemke,
My Dear IOC Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Two years ago, we gathered at The Olympic Museum in Lausanne to launch a
new effort to place sport at the service of humanity. Much has happened since
that First International Forum on Sport for Peace and Development in May 2009.

The foundation for collaboration that we created at the inaugural forum has
proven its worth. We can see the results in projects around the world. We have
made a very good start.

Our task at this 2nd International Forum on Sport for Peace and Development is
to strengthen and deepen our collaboration, and to find new and better ways to
use sport as a tool for positive change.

For the first time we are meeting in the premises of the United Nations
headquarters in Geneva, which will provide an inspiring setting for our two-day
discussions. I congratulate the Forum organisers for an excellent agenda that
includes a dual focus on policy and implementation. Policy is important because
it provides the strategic framework for our efforts. But policy without
implementation is talk without action.

Our ultimate objective is to be successful and efficient on the ground – to serve
humankind. To get there, the contribution of a range of stakeholders is needed:
we need the commitment and action of governments, which are key players in
mainstreaming sport into development policies. We need the coordinating
support and the expertise of specialised UN agencies. The sports world
contributes with its world-wide network and its sport-specific knowledge. And of
course, without the involvement of non-governmental organisations and civil
society at large, it would be difficult to reach out to communities in all continents.

We are not here to celebrate past achievements, but to lay the groundwork for
future success. Partnerships have been the key in the past and will be as crucial
for the way forward.
Let’s look at the example of the growing collaboration between the International Olympic Committee and the United Nations. Our two organisations share many common values — a belief in equality, respect for others, a commitment to fair play and the rule of law.

Our missions overlap. Both the IOC and the UN exist to serve humankind. Both seek to foster harmony between nations and cultures. Both strive to create a more peaceful, prosperous and environmentally sustainable world.

Of course, there are also some very significant differences between our organisations.

The IOC is, first and foremost, a sport organisation. Although we operate in a politicised world, we seek to transcend politics. We strive to create an environment at the Olympic Games that is free of political and diplomatic conflict, as well as ethnic, religious and cultural tensions.

We want the Games to be a sanctuary for sport that celebrates our common humanity. We cannot achieve that goal if we become an active agent for political change.

We seek change through sport — and the promotion of peace and development has been at the centre of the Olympic Movement since its inception. Our founder, Pierre de Coubertin, believed deeply that the unifying power of sport could help lead us to a more peaceful world.

Sport cannot solve all of the world’s ills, but it can contribute to meaningful solutions. Sport provides a common language. It breaks down barriers and brings people together. It is a magnet for young people that can be used to teach positive values and valuable life lessons.

Sport supports development at the individual and the societal level. It promotes healthy bodies, healthy minds and healthy communities. It contributes to economic growth and community cohesion.

In all of these areas related to peace and development, the IOC and the UN have common goals. And we have shown time and again that we can be more effective working together.

Our cooperation dates back to the earliest years of the UN’s existence, but we have only begun to tap the full potential of our collaboration. I commend Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Wilfried Lemke, the Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace, for their success in integrating sport into the UN’s important work.

Two very significant events that occurred just months after we last met in
Lausanne for the first Forum took the longstanding relationship between the IOC and the UN to another level.

In early October 2009, the Secretary-General delivered the keynote address at the XIII Olympic Congress in Copenhagen. He told the Congress delegates: “Olympic principles are United Nations principles.”

His remarks set the stage for the UN General Assembly’s decision just a few weeks later to grant the IOC official UN Observer status. That action was a resounding acknowledgement of sport’s role in serving the cause of peace and development. It was quite fitting that the decision on Observer Status came on the same day the General Assembly approved a resolution calling for an Olympic Truce in connection with the Vancouver Games.

Reviving a practice from the ancient Olympic Games, the General Assembly has approved the Olympic Truce for every edition of the Games since 1994. It is a symbolic reminder that the Olympic Games have always been a platform to advance the cause of peace. In autumn, we will see the adoption of the Olympic Truce Resolution for the next Olympic Games in London in 2012.

Today, we are working with various UN agencies in countries around the world. Our partners include the World Food Programme, UNEP, UNHCR, UNAIDS, UNICEF and the World Health Organisation.

UN agencies were also heavily involved in the Culture and Education Programme at the inaugural Youth Olympic Games in Singapore last summer, which put a strong focus on social responsibility and was embraced by the 3,500 young people from countries around the world. We look forward to the UN’s valuable contributions again at the first Winter Youth Olympic Games in Innsbruck next year.

We are deeply engaged in efforts to achieve the UN’s Millennium Development Goals. My esteemed colleague, Mario Pescante, who is doing an excellent job as the first Permanent Observer for the IOC to the United Nations, will offer a more detailed look at our work in that area later this morning.

The IOC is also committed to another important UN initiative, the Rio +20 process, which was in the focus of our discussions in Doha earlier this month, during the 9th IOC World Conference on Sport and the Environment. The Conference was an important starting point in renewing the sporting community’s political commitments and strengthening our partnerships on the road to the 2012 Earth Summit led by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. Sport can and must play a leading role in contributing to a cleaner and more sustainable world.
As we seek ways to expand our collaboration with the UN, we are also continuing our separate efforts to promote peace and development. The IOC will never let the existence of our UN partnership become an excuse for inaction when we have an opportunity to deliver positive change on our own.

For example, we have been working with the Palestinian and Israeli National Olympic Committees, as well as government officials, on a plan to ease travel restrictions that hinder the ability of Palestinian athletes to train and compete. I am hopeful that cooperation from all concerned will help resolve this problem.

Last May, we opened our first Youth Olympic Development Centre in Lusaka, Zambia, with help from the Zambian National Olympic Committee; six International and National Federations; and the Zambian government. We are now working on a similar project for Haiti.

We have accomplished a lot since our first Forum two years ago, but we know there is much more to do. Thanks to the UN, sport has found its rightful place in the global agenda for peace and development. Now we must make the most of this opportunity to put sport to work for the good of humanity.

Let us use the foundation that we established to build more durable and more effective partnerships for peace and development.

I look forward to a successful and a rewarding Forum.

Thank you.