Mayor,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This magnificent Maritime Museum expresses very well the identity of the Netherlands, a nation of sailors, explorers and merchants. Not far from here, the Rijksmuseum displays the great Dutch and Flemish painters. Amsterdam splendidly shows the combination of enterprise and culture.

With the opening of the 8th IOC World Conference on Sport, Culture and Education, Amsterdam and the Netherlands are building on a great Olympic heritage.

The list of great Olympians from the Netherlands is indeed a very long one. Dutch athletes have won 351 medals at the Summer and Winter Games. Given the size of the population, this is a great achievement.

Competitors like Inge de Bruijn, Leontien Van Moorsel, Anky van Grunsven, Ard Schenk, Fanny Blankers-Koen, Johan Cruyff and Anton Geesink have amazed and inspired people around the world.

Amsterdam’s Olympic heritage includes serving as host of the Games of the IX Olympiad in 1928.
There is a story behind those Games that I particularly appreciate, being one of your Belgian neighbours.

The Netherlands wanted to host the Games in 1920, but graciously agreed to let the honour go to Antwerp. Four years later, Amsterdam stepped aside again when Pierre de Coubertin wanted Paris to host the Olympic Games as a celebration of the 30th anniversary of the founding of the IOC.

Fortunately, Dutch patience and perseverance finally paid off, and the 1928 Games were a great success. These were the first Games with a significant level of female participation, and where the Olympic flame was lit for the first time.

The Dutch National Olympic Committee - *Nederlandse Sport Federatie* - which recently celebrated its 100th anniversary, has a proud past. Our Dutch friends are also supporting the Olympic Movement by staging the next European Youth Olympic Festival in Utrecht, and by bidding with Rotterdam for the 2018 Youth Olympic Games.

This 8th World Conference on Sport, Culture and Education is a great chance to share ideas on how to tap the full potential of the power of sport to be a force for good.

We will explore new ways to engage young people in a rapidly changing world. We will reassert the educational and cultural power of sport.

Our work begins tomorrow, but tonight, I hope you all enjoy this celebration of cultural achievement and the outstanding programme that our hosts have arranged for us.

On behalf of the International Olympic Committee, may I offer our thanks to Andre Bolhuis, President of the Netherlands Olympic Committee, Mr Engida,
Deputy Director-General of UNESCO and to our colleague, Lambis Nikolaou, Chairman of the Commission for Culture and Olympic Education; for an excellent conference programme.

I want to thank Mayor Van der Laan, the national authorities and the people of Amsterdam for welcoming us to their splendid city. Last but not least, let me acknowledge the presence of Lord Sebastian Coe, Chair of the Organising Committee for the Olympic Games in London, for the splendid job he and his colleagues did in organising a very successful event.

I also congratulate him for being elected President of the British Olympic Association.

I wish you all a pleasant evening and a productive conference.