Speech
on the occasion of
Opening Ceremony - 126th Session
Sochi, 4 February 2014

- Check against delivery -

President of the Russian Federation
President of the Russian Olympic Committee
President of Sochi 2014 Organising Committee
Head of the State Commission for the Preparation and Delivery of the Sochi
2014 Olympic Winter Games and Deputy Prime Minister
Dear Friends and Colleagues, IOC members
Ladies and Gentlemen

This is a night of great anticipation and wonderful dreams. As we enjoy
Russia’s rich heritage and culture, the world’s best winter athletes are
gathering in the Olympic Villages. And from my own athlete’s experience I
can tell you they dream many dreams. They are longing for their day of
competition.

They finally want to show the world the high standards they have achieved
after many years of hard training and tough competition. They are craving
for the moment when the Olympic Flame is shining over the Olympic
Stadium and it becomes clear for everybody that the athletes have gathered
here for sport, for excellence, for friendship.

There is also a lot of anticipation among us, the IOC Members. We are
responsible for giving the athletes the opportunity to make their dream come
ture, to create the framework for fair competition, to prepare the stage for
unique sports performances.

And tonight, just three days away from the opening of the Sochi 2014
Olympic Winter Games we can tell the athletes: the stage, your Olympic
stage is ready.
To realize what a great achievement this is, we should remember how things were seven years ago. At that time, this great winter sport nation, after the dissolution of the USSR, no longer had a winter sports centre. Russian national championships had to be held in foreign countries.

Then Russia decided to solve this deficit by using a candidature for the Olympic Winter Games 2014 as a catalyst for the development of sport, a city and a whole region.

At the time of the election of Sochi in 2007 and for many years after, there was a lot of scepticism in and outside the IOC concerning this visionary project.

A project to create the best possible conditions for the athletes, a project to modernize a regional summer resort and at the same time a project to transform it to a year-round international tourist, convention and sports destination.

With this project Sochi won the election. Now just seven years later, we can see that Sochi, that Russia has delivered. I would like to thank the President of the Russian Federation, Mr. Vladimir Putin for the great commitment he has shown to these Olympic Winter Games, from leading the candidature until today.

You, Mr. President, with your government, and in particular with Deputy Prime Minister Kozak, have set the pace in this great endeavour.

I would like to thank the Sochi Organizing Committee, under the leadership of Dmitry Chernyshenko, who with his young and enthusiastic team overcame so many challenges.

I would like to thank our IOC friends and colleagues Vitaly Smirnov, Shamil Tarpischev, Alexander Popov and Alexander Zhukov for their unwavering support which they showed together with the Russian Olympic Committee.

I would like to thank the IOC Coordination Commission and in particular its chairman, our friend and colleague Jean-Claude Killy, who together with our Olympic Games Department did so much that we can be so confident tonight.

I would like to thank the many men and women who, under sometimes difficult circumstances, worked so hard and delivered so much.
I would like to thank the people of Sochi and the Krasnodar region for their patience during this sometimes challenging transformation process. Today you can look with pride on your new home, region and with confidence to your future.

I would like to thank the many thousands of volunteers who have welcomed us here so warmly. By establishing for the first time ever such a culture of volunteering in this country, this Olympic Games will leave a great legacy that will strengthen civil society in Russia.

These seven years of preparation have demonstrated once more how much the Olympic Games draw the world's attention to the host city and nation. We welcome this. It gives us the opportunity to realize the world-wide relevance of Olympic Games; to stress the importance of sport in society; and to disseminate and promote our values.

In all these discussions we should be very clear about our mission, our values, our responsibility but also about our limits.

The IOC is first of all a sports organization. As defined by the Olympic Charter, our mission is "to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity".

With the Olympic Games we want to show the host country and the world that such a peaceful society is possible, that competition among people can happen in harmony and with respect for the dignity of all. The Olympic Games and sport in general are the only area of human existence with a truly universal law. This universal law of sport is based on global ethics, fair play, respect and friendship.

These ethics, these values come to life through the athletes in their competition and maybe even more through their living together in the Olympic Village.

There, these young people from all corners of our planet are living together harmoniously and peaceably. They are in competition with each other, and yet they share meals. They want to achieve their best, and yet they understand each other. They want to win, and yet they respect each other.

It is our responsibility to make this "Island of Utopia" a reality for the duration of the Olympic Games and to set an example for the future.
This we can only achieve if we are politically neutral without being apolitical.

This we can only achieve if we protect the athletes, if we protect the venues, if we protect the Olympic Village from being used for political demonstrations, however important and precious the cause may be.

This we can only achieve if these Olympic Values of fair play, respect and friendship can be freely exercised in the Olympic Games.

Respect means that we all fight together against any form of discrimination on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender, sexual orientation or any other prejudice.

So we have been greatly satisfied by the assurances received from the President of the Russian Federation and its government that the Olympic Charter will be fully respected during this Olympic Winter Games.

This is our, this is the IOC's responsibility: To ensure the application of the Olympic Charter for the Olympic Games. This is also where our limits are. We are not a supra-national government, we are not a superior world-parliament, we do not have a mandate to impose measures on sovereign states. But by living up to our responsibilities we are having a positive influence on the development of societies through sport.

Nelson Mandela, whom we all so dearly miss, Nelson Mandela said it quite simply "Sport can change the world".

And, indeed, we contribute to a better society. We contribute to peace.

The Olympic Games send our message to all the peoples of the world, to all the political leaders of the world. The Olympic Movement embraces the global diversity of cultures, societies and life designs as a source of richness. We want to prove that respect for rules, respect for your competitor and, respectful dialogue can transcend all differences. Boycotts of any kind undermine these fundamental principles and values.

The Olympic Movement always stands for building bridges to bring people together, not for erecting walls to keep them apart. The Olympic Movement exists to place sport at the service of humanity. The athletes are at the forefront of this effort. That is why, during the current Olympiad, from 2013 to 2016, we will support the athletes of the world by providing almost 5 billion dollars directly to their International Federations, to their National Olympic Committees and to the Organising Committees of the Olympic Games.
To generate and manage these resources, and all the IOC'S sport-related programmes, will require less than 10 percent of our projected revenues. For all of these many reasons, we can proudly say: The Olympic Movement stands for the human right to play sport, stands for global solidarity, stands for equal rights for all the athletes of the world, stands for sustainable sports development, stands for building peace through sport.

This is the message the Olympic Games send to the world of politics and to society. We want politicians and leaders in society to understand this message and to ponder how they can make their societies better by applying these principles in their area of responsibility.

In this ambitious endeavour to contribute to a better and more peaceful world we can only succeed if we can cooperate with political leaders who share our vision that "Sport can change the world". Sharing this vision means allowing sport to exercise its power for the good, it means respecting the universal law of sport, it means respecting the athletes, it means respecting the Olympic Values, it means respecting the political neutrality of sport, it means respecting diversity.

In the last couple of months, we have again seen that we still have some work to do to convince all political leaders of this mission of the Olympic Movement and this great legacy of President Mandela.

We are very grateful to the many political leaders around the world who have understood and respect this power of sport, who support the athletes, who know what positive effect sport has on education, health and for the cohesion of societies.

We are grateful to those who respect the fact that sport can only contribute to development and peace if it is not used as a stage for political dissent or for trying to score points in internal or external political contests.

To other political leaders we say: Please understand what our responsibilities are and what your responsibilities are.
Have the courage to address your disagreements in a peaceful direct political dialogue and not on the backs of the athletes. It is my deepest conviction that this would also be in your well-understood long-term political interest. People have a very good understanding of what it really means to single out the Olympic Games to make an ostentatious gesture which allegedly costs nothing but produces international headlines.

In the extreme we had to see a few politicians whose contribution to the fight for a good cause consisted of publicly declining invitations they had not even received.

The Olympic Movement seeks a partnership of mutual respect with all the governments of the world. The pinnacle of this cooperation is our relationship with the United Nations, where we enjoy the status of Permanent Observer.

You cannot better express the deep roots of this relationship than UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon who said: "Olympic Principles are United Nations Principles". We want to make this bond with the UN even stronger while enjoying the same kind of mutually respectful value-based cooperation with national governments.

In this context, it will be my great honour and pleasure to welcome the Secretary-General of the United Nations to his first ever appearance at a Session of the International Olympic Committee. We are looking forward to his inspiring address in two days' time.

The 126th IOC Session whose work will start tomorrow offers us a great opportunity to look to the future of the Olympic Movement as we prepare our strategic roadmap, the Olympic Agenda 2020. Some people asked me why I started this dialogue for change immediately after my election, not yet five months ago.

There are two reasons:
First, because I promised it in my election programme.
Second, because it is always better to make changes when an organisation is successful rather than when it is in a crisis.

Because of the great legacy of our Honorary President Jacques Rogge, whom I thank once more, we can now start to build our future on a strong foundation.
This discussion should always reflect our great strength, which is our "Unity in Diversity". This is why I invited my fellow presidential candidates for individual meetings to exchange ideas and to find common ground, wherever possible.

This is why the Executive Board had a four-day brainstorming meeting to collect even more ideas. This is why I convened to the so-called Olympic Summit, comprising the leaders of the Olympic Stakeholders. I would like to thank all the IOC members, IF and NOC Presidents and everybody who has already contributed to this dialogue.

And I would like to encourage you, my dear friends and colleagues, to contribute even more in the general debate which has been scheduled in our Session for one and a half days. We should not expect any immediate decisions.

First we want to have an open, transparent discussion about the future of the Olympic Movement. We want to collect even more ideas and positions.

After this, Olympic Winter Games working groups and commissions, including representatives of our stakeholders, will have the task of transforming all these debates into recommendations for decisions. These decisions we will take all together at an Extraordinary IOC Session from the 7th to 9th December this year in Monaco, establishing our Olympic Agenda 2020.

After my many conversations and meetings I expect this debate to be mainly around three major topics.

There is the topic of sustainability. We need to ensure the uniqueness and relevance of the Olympic Games by devising an over-arching concept of sustainability. In this context we can address questions about restructuring the bidding procedure by giving more room for creativity and diversity to the candidate cities, by focusing more on sustainability and legacy from the very beginning.

We can discuss the composition of the programme, the management, the cost and the legacy of the Olympic Games.
There is the topic of credibility.
This is extremely important for our future.
Here we should speak about the credibility of the sports competitions as well as about the credibility of the sport organizations.
With regard to the sports competitions we should focus on our ultimate goal, on our ultimate responsibility: It is all about the clean athletes.

The fight for the clean athletes - this should be our motto in the Olympic Agenda 2020. Fighting for the clean athletes means we have to protect them from doping, any kind of manipulation and related corruption.

Therefore the IOC has already, before this Olympic Games, increased the number of pre-competition anti-doping tests by 57% compared to Vancouver 2010.

We have also created two funds of 10 Million Dollars each, to improve anti-doping research and to better fight against match-fixing.

We invite the governments of the world, with whom we share equally the responsibility for the World Anti-Doping Agency to match this additional contribution of the IOC.

This is on top of the world-wide investment in the fight against doping which represents about 300.000 anti-doping tests per year and an overall financial investment estimated by experts to be around half a billion dollars per year.

With regard to strengthening the fight against match-fixing and related corruption, the IOC signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Interpol just a couple of days ago.

As far as the credibility of sports organizations is concerned we will discuss how we can improve our good governance, how we can create more transparency, how we can protect our responsible autonomy which we need to accomplish our global mission.

There is the topic of youth.
There will be no Olympic future without an Olympic youth.

Therefore we have to consider how we can convince the youth of the world not only to watch, but to play sport. We have to find ways to get the "couch-potatoes" off the couch.
In this context we should speak about education, about the Olympic athletes as role models and also about the development of the Youth Olympic Games.

Already for their edition in Nanjing the IOC Executive Board last December opened the door to some young sports and disciplines like climbing, skateboarding and roller-sports to make a presentation.

For making the dreams of the Olympic Athletes come true, for turning our anticipation into reality, these topics of Sustainability, Credibility and Youth are key.

Let us address these topics with an open mind, let us think "out of the box" whenever necessary, let us undertake to shape our future, let us create "Unity in Diversity".