



INTERNATIONAL  
OLYMPIC  
COMMITTEE

**Thomas Bach**  
**President**

**Statement on the occasion of the adoption of the resolution**  
**“Building a peaceful and better world through sport and**  
**the Olympic ideal”**

**68<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly**  
**New York, 6 November 2013**

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) conveys its compliments to the UN General Assembly and is honoured to have the opportunity to address you today, with three months to go before the opening of the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Sochi, on the occasion of the debate on the Resolution entitled “Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal”.

First of all, I would like to thank all those who have helped bring us to this point. The IOC expresses its gratitude to the Government of the Russian Federation and its UN representatives for submitting the resolution to the General Assembly in advance of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Olympic Winter Games.

I would also like to thank the Group of Friends of Sport and in particular the UN Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace, Wilfried Lemke. They have played a leading role in support of sport and the broader effort to integrate sport into the work of the United Nations across a wide range of issues.

We are grateful that the esteemed General Assembly has supported the Olympic Truce resolution entitled “Building a better world through sport and the Olympic ideal” before every edition of the Games since 1994, and to the Office of the Special Adviser of the Secretary General on Sport for Development and Peace for its commendable work.

We urge your support for the Olympic Truce again today.

“Olympic principles are United Nations principles,” said Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in his keynote speech to the 2009 Olympic Congress in Copenhagen.

And our bond has become even stronger since this General Assembly granted the IOC Permanent Observer status that same year.

“Olympic principles are United Nations principles.”

That is just as true today, as the General Assembly addresses a tradition dating from thousands of years ago in Ancient Greece: the *ekecheiria*.

This sacred truce, the Olympic Truce, is based on the tradition which followed an agreement between three ancient Greek Kings. At the time, the Olympic Games were the only bond that linked the Greeks together. There was no political unity. Only the Games brought Greeks from the mainland and the colonies together, just for a few days every four years. The *ekecheiria* ensured a halt to hostilities, allowing athletes and spectators to travel safely to Olympia and home again.

This shows that already, thousands of years ago, a partnership between sport and politics existed.

This partnership was, and is, not without its frictions, but it endures. Now it is the time to adapt it for today's world.

Our partnership today has a completely different dimension. At the time, three city states came together.

At the United Nations today, we are talking about an association of 193 States, and, at the International Olympic Committee, 204 recognised National Olympic Committees. This is a new dimension of the challenge in our partnership between politics and sport.

The IOC is above all a sports organisation. Sport is our first priority.

The IOC recognises its obligation to youth and society by contributing to the betterment of the quality of life in accordance with its fundamental principles as set out in the Olympic Charter, namely: “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”.

This describes universal values and goals, like the ones of the United Nations.

Sport has a good starting point for putting these into practice, being truly the only area of human existence which has achieved what is known in political philosophy as “universal law”, and in moral philosophy as a “global ethic”.

Regardless of where in the world we practise sport, the rules are the same. They are recognised worldwide.

They are based on a common “global ethic” of fair play, tolerance and friendship.

But to apply this “universal law” worldwide and spread our values globally, sport has to enjoy responsible autonomy. Politics must respect this sporting autonomy.

For only then can sport organisations implement these universal values amidst all the differing laws, customs and traditions.

Responsible autonomy does not mean that sport should operate in a law-free environment.

It does mean that we respect national laws which are not targeted against sport and its organisations alone, sometimes for chiefly political reasons.

In many UN member countries, the fact that sport can hold its international competitions and promote its values only if enjoying autonomy is not always understood or accepted.

For this reason, I ask you all to take this message back to your countries.

In the mutual interest of both sport and politics, please help to protect and strengthen the autonomy of sport.

Only in this way we can create the win-win situation of a fruitful partnership for the benefit of youth and society in general.

This naturally means that sport, too, must live up to its responsibilities.

Our partners in politics, whom we expect to respect our autonomy, are entitled to expect that we exercise this autonomy responsibly and in accordance with the rules of good governance.

The IOC sets an example in this regard. We want the “Universal Principles of Good Governance of the Olympic Movement” to be accepted as a minimum standard and implemented at all levels of sport.

Within this partnership, sport must remain politically neutral.

This does not mean that sport is apolitical. Sport must include political considerations in its decisions. It must consider the political, economic and social implications of its decisions.

This is particularly true when choosing the venues for major sports events, above all the biggest and most important of these, the Olympic Games.

With the Olympic Games, the IOC sets an example for peaceful interaction.

The Olympic Games, the Olympic athletes and in particular the Olympic Village are a powerful symbol of this. They break down the barriers of cultural differences. They serve as an example of mutual respect and non-discrimination.

And it is always moving, not least for me as a former athlete, to see how, in the Olympic Village, young people from all parts of the world live together harmoniously and peacefully. Here, the Olympic spirit is alive.

Beyond that, Organising Committees are increasingly taking up the vision of the Olympic Truce.

The London 2012 programme offered young people in every school and college across the United Kingdom the chance to take part in sporting and cultural activities which helped encourage peace in their schools and communities.

The Sochi 2014 youth initiatives are also aimed at promoting peace, harmony and respect.

As part of this programme, the Sochi Organising Committee is devoting a great deal of attention to working with young people all over Russia as well as internationally, and drawing their attention to peace, tolerance and participation.

Going beyond the Games themselves, the International Olympic Committee seeks to set examples of mutual understanding and solidarity.

Through the programmes run by Olympic Solidarity, the International Sports Federations and National Olympic Committees, we emphasise that striving for peace requires sustainable development, solidarity and support. In the current Olympiad, the Olympic family is investing more than 600 million US dollars on putting this solidarity into practice.

Precisely because many of our principles are the same, it must always be clear in the relationship between sport and politics that the role of sport is always to build bridges. It is never to build walls.

Sport stands for dialogue and understanding which transcend all differences. Sport, and the Olympic Movement especially, understands the global diversity of cultures, societies and life designs as a source of richness. We never accuse or exclude anyone.

For this reason, we oppose boycotts of any kind. Boycotts are a fundamental contradiction to the spirit of sport, depriving it of the means to work for peace, mutual understanding and solidarity.

This is even more true if sport is the sole instrument misused for a boycott, while political, economic and cultural relations continue as normal.

If the International Olympic Committee and the United Nations stand side by side in this partnership understood in this way, even more fruitful cooperation is possible, particularly in the areas of education, development, integration and efforts for peace.

Sport is not just physical activity; it promotes health and helps prevent, or even cure, the diseases of modern civilisation. It is also an educational tool which fosters cognitive development; teaches social behaviour; and helps to integrate communities.

For this reason, we offer an even more intensive dialogue with the United Nations and in particular UNESCO. Education and learning are the keys to the future of all our societies.

*Mens sana in corpore sano.* That old Latin phrase puts this in a nutshell. A healthy mind in a healthy body.

I therefore plead for the educational asset that sport represents, and the teaching of values through sport, be included in school curricula all over the world.

Both our organisations feel obliged to help young people enjoy a better future.

The IOC therefore welcomes the Secretary-General's UN Youth Strategy and the appointment of the Special Envoy for Youth.

We are thankful for the contribution of UN agencies to the Culture and Education Programme at the Youth Olympic Games.

In order to work together even more closely, we suggest enhancing our cooperation with respect to sport as an instrument for development and peace.

We applaud the General Assembly's historic decision in August to establish the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace. In this context, the General Assembly recalled the IOC's role in promoting healthy lifestyles and creating access to sport for as many people as possible.

Sport promotes integration; it boosts self-esteem as well as joy of life.

This can play an important role in the integration of societies, but also in crisis areas, where the IOC works with humanitarian and development agencies. We are prepared to do even more.

The integrative power of sport can work its magic in crisis areas, helping to build understanding and reconciliation, and at the same time improve quality of life.

All these measures can be ways to build a better and peaceful world.

Of course, we know that, as in Ancient Greece, sport and the Olympic Games cannot on their own solve political problems or achieve peace.

Peace-building is a long process. Sport wants to be part of this process. However, we are aware of our limits – but we want to use the power of our values and symbols to promote the positive, peaceful development of global society.

These symbols, and especially the peaceful competition at the Olympic Games, should inspire all the people.

They should show that rivalries and disputes can be resolved peacefully. They should show that people can transcend all boundaries by agreeing on universal rules to govern human competition and resolve conflicts.

For this reason, the Olympic Truce is of particular significance.

We set great store on this common endeavour, which is such a splendid example of how, in partnership, politics and sport can complement each other.

We are grateful to the General Assembly and the Secretary-General for the fruitful cooperation that has been built on trust.

Together with the political authorities, the IOC wishes to set an example for peace and solidarity in the quest for a more humane society.

Our partnership clearly illustrates that "Olympic principles are United Nations principles".

Let us work together to make these universal principles a reality.

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