



INTERNATIONAL  
OLYMPIC  
COMMITTEE

**Thomas Bach**  
**President**

**Speech**  
**on the occasion of**  
**NOC of Denmark's congress on sports:**  
**"Can Sport Save the World"**  
**Copenhagen, 5 March 2015**

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It is a great pleasure being with all of you here today in Copenhagen. It is an even greater pleasure to be here together with my IOC friend and colleague, His Royal Highness Prince Frederick of Denmark.

Your Royal Highness, you have played a very active role in the discussion about the Olympic Agenda 2020. You are passionate about sport and fully dedicated to the Olympic Movement. I would like to thank you very much for your great commitment and contribution.

Please also allow me to thank and congratulate Niels Nygaard, the President of the National Olympic Committee and Sports Confederation of Denmark.

Dear Niels, you and your NOC team have always been very engaged in safeguarding and promoting the Olympic Values. By organizing this important Congress you are emphasizing once more that sport in Denmark is indeed based on values and is putting sport at the service of society.

Some weeks ago we were all shocked by the barbaric attacks here in Copenhagen. I am certain that I am not speaking only for myself, but on behalf of the entire Olympic Movement, when saying that such appalling acts are attacks on the values of all civilised people.

Please allow me to pay tribute to the Danish people and the brave way that you addressed those barbaric acts. Our thoughts are with those who lost loved ones.

The entire Olympic Movement, just as all right-thinking people, stand shoulder to shoulder with you. The way you have dealt with this tragedy, by dialogue, by keeping the doors to your country open by standing together in defence of your values is an example for us all.

Therefore it is timely to be here with you in this magnificent city and in this wonderful country to discuss about values. Values which are as well our Olympic Values: tolerance, friendship and respect.

This country has been closely linked with the Olympic Movement from the very beginning. Denmark was one of the 14 countries to participate in the first modern Olympic Games 1896. Copenhagen has been involved in many significant moments of Olympic history.

You were hosting six years ago the 121st IOC Session, as well the XII Olympic Congress. Already at that time in 2009 the topic was: "The Olympic Movement in Society."

Today's topic 'Can Sport Save the World?' is a continuation of that debate in a world that has changed a lot since then. The Olympic Movement is addressing these dramatic changes in our reform programme, Olympic Agenda 2020. This was unanimously approved by the Extraordinary IOC Session last December in Monaco.

These reforms are designed to strengthen the Olympic Movement in society. Only with these reforms can we protect Olympic Values and put the Olympic Movement at the heart of society.

Sport can contribute a lot to a better and more peaceful society. Because sport is truly the only area of human existence which has achieved what is known in political philosophy as universal law. Regardless of where we practice sport, regardless of who is playing sport, the rules are the same. They are recognized worldwide. They are based on a common 'global ethic' of fair-play, tolerance and friendship. This means in sport all people are equal.

In order to be able to apply this universal law worldwide and to promote this global ethic sport must be politically neutral.

If not, we could not ensure the equal treatment of all people without any kind of discrimination – sport would be torn apart by politics.

We have seen this in the past with some political boycotts which did not serve any good purpose. Furthermore, boycotts are a fundamental contradiction to the spirit of sport depriving it of the means to work for peace, mutual understanding and solidarity.

To be politically neutral does not mean to be apolitical. In fact in the past many people pretended falsely two things:

Firstly, that sport has nothing to do with money. Secondly, that sport has nothing to do with politics. Both were always and are always wrong – already at the ancient Olympic Games around 3000 years ago.

Sport is not an isolated island in the sea of society. Sport cannot ignore reality. The world is not run by sports organizations but by governments. Therefore sport must engage with society.

This means that on the one hand we must be politically neutral and on the other hand we must consider the political implication of our decisions.

This is most obvious when it comes to choosing the venues for major sports events, above all for the biggest and most important of these, the Olympic Games.

Because already a candidature for the Olympic Games draws the world's attention to the candidate country. This is even more true for the Host Country with the additional economic implications and investments.

Choosing a host city does not mean that the IOC necessarily agrees with the political and/or the legal system in the host country.

It does not mean that we agree with the death penalty or with discrimination, just to give two examples.

It means however that in every country where we organize Olympic Games, we want to send the strong message of tolerance, respect and fair play. It means that we require compliance with all the values of the Olympic Charter for all participants at the Olympic Games.

This is why we are demanding from the host countries the necessary assurances.

We were facing such a situation with regard to legislation in Russia which prohibits the public promotion of homosexual orientation. The IOC asked for and received assurances that this law would not apply for any of the participants of the Olympic Games. This assurance was fully respected.

Another example was the situation of unpaid migrant workers on the Olympic sites. After the IOC raised this issue more than 500 companies were investigated and unpaid wages in the amount of more than 8 million US Dollars was paid to 6175 workers.

Another example occurred during the Youth Olympic Games in Nanjing, where following a request by the IOC the internet was made fully accessible for all the participants at all the Youth Olympic sites.

In order to strengthen the position of the IOC in this respect, the Olympic Agenda 2020 has amended the fundamental principle 6 of the Olympic Charter. It now says: "The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Olympic Charter shall be secured without discrimination of any kind such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin,

property, birth or other status.” This language used in the Olympic Charter mirrors the text of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Furthermore, with the Olympic Agenda 2020 we are stating in the Host City Contract that “the organization of the Games must comply with local, regional and national legislation and international agreements and protocols applicable in the host country with regard to planning, construction, protection of the environment, health and safety and labour laws.”

The Olympic Agenda 2020 also ensures that the Host City Contract is made public.

This compliance with the Olympic Charter by the Host Country for the Olympic Games ensures that we can send our strong message to the Host Country and to the whole world. This is the Olympic message of a society of peace, tolerance and respect.

In the Olympic Village athletes from all the 205 National Olympic Committees are living together in harmony without any form of discrimination. They are competing with each other, but they are also living together under one roof. They share their meals and their emotions. They respect each other and their different backgrounds.

They get to know and to understand each other better. This form of dialogue is the basis for any peaceful society. In this way the Olympic Games can show us all how the world could be.

Therefore it is the responsibility of the IOC to ensure the application of the Olympic Charter at the Olympic Games.

At the same time we must acknowledge that we have neither the mandate nor the capability to change the laws or the political system of a sovereign country. The IOC is neither a world government, nor a superior world parliament.

This principle is more and more accepted by governments, governmental organisations as well as by NGOs. On the basis of this principle we are seeking their advice and have an open dialogue with organizations representing the LGBT community, as well as Human Rights Watch, Transparency International, the Committee to Protect Journalists and the International Trades Union Confederation.

I appreciate this dialogue very much because in our complex world any progress requires cooperation. This is why the Olympic Agenda 2020 is calling for an open dialogue between the IOC and representatives of other areas of society as well as with politicians.

The most prominent example of such a cooperation is our partnership with the United Nations. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has said at the Olympic Congress 2009 here in Copenhagen: “Olympic principles are United Nations principles.” In this spirit we signed last year a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations to cooperate on projects for conflict resolution, to promote gender equality, to encourage

healthier lifestyles, to make the lives of people in refugee camps better, to fight disease and to address other humanitarian issues – all this through sport.

In a resolution passed last November by the UN General Assembly this contribution of sport to foster dialogue, peace and development was recognized by the world community.

In the same resolution the UN General Assembly recognizes “that major international sports events should be organized in the spirit of peace, mutual understanding, friendship, tolerance and inadmissibility of discrimination of any kind and that the unifying and conciliative nature of such events should be respected”.

Furthermore the resolution supports the leadership position of the IOC and the autonomy of sport. Only this autonomy can ensure the political neutrality of sport, the worldwide equal application of sports law and the promotion of the Olympic Values.

If we are requesting respect for autonomy we have to exercise autonomy with responsibility, which means in accordance with the rules of good governance.

The IOC with its rules and regulations and in particular with Olympic Agenda 2020 has addressed this issue of good governance with a number of measures:

Our financial statements are prepared and audited according to the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) even if these higher standards are legally not required. We will also publish an annual activity and financial report including the allowance policy for IOC members.

This transparent report will show how 90 percent of our revenues are distributed to the sporting movement and to the athletes. This means 3,25 million US dollars are distributed by the IOC every day of the year for the development of sport worldwide.

With this policy of solidarity the IOC enables also the organization of Olympic Games in a feasible way. We have for example supported the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi with 833 million US Dollars. This allowed for an operational surplus of approximately 50 million US dollars. In the spirit of this policy of solidarity the IOC did not claim its contractual 20 percent share of this profit, but put it at the disposal of the Russian Olympic Committee for use in the development of sport, the Olympic Channel and the Olympic Museum in Russia.

For the success of the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro 2016 the IOC will contribute around 1,5 billion US dollars. With this contribution the Organizing Committee is in a position to make the Olympic Games the most inclusive ever. Literally millions of Brazilians will have the opportunity to follow the Games live and to enjoy the Olympic Spirit on site.

On the one hand, millions of Brazilians will have access to the marathons, the marathon swimming events, triathlons, rowing, the road races in cycling and the

walking races. On the other hand more than seven million tickets will be available. 3,8 million of these tickets will be sold for about 30 US dollars or less. The cheapest tickets will be about 15 US dollars. In addition there is a reduction available for students and elderly people.

Thanks to a cooperation between the Organizing Committee and a specialized NGO, hundreds of small businesses have access to the tender process for contracts worth about 1 billion US Dollars. In addition, all of the 250,000 people who applied to be volunteers will receive English courses and training.

With our Olympic Values, with all these activities, with all these financial contributions, with all this energy, with all our positive emotion, with all our determination: Can sport save the world?

If we would want to answer this question definitely, we would first of all have to have a very philosophical debate to determine whether the world needs really to be saved. It is true, our world is more fragile than ever, society is more fragmented and individualistic than ever. We are living in a time of crisis – political crisis, financial crisis, terrorism, war and civil war.

On the other hand we are living in a global society with more opportunities than ever. Opportunities for communication, for dialogue, for global solidarity, for social development and for peace. We are living at a moment when we do not know which way the world will choose to go – or worse which way the world will let itself go.

What does all this mean for us? First of all it means that our message of dialogue, of respect for rules, our message of tolerance, solidarity and peace – that this Olympic message is perhaps more relevant than ever.

Even if the world may not need to be 'saved' in the true sense of the word, it clearly needs progress. Progress towards a better, harmonious and peaceful society. Sport can neither save the world alone nor can it alone make the world a better and peaceful place. But sport has the power to contribute to a better, a more harmonious and peaceful world.

With our universal sports law, which treats all people as equal, with our philosophy that the only difference between people comes from achievements made by respecting this law, with our message from the Olympic Village that people can be in tough competition and at the same time living peacefully together, with our symbols and ceremonies representing the unity of the world in all its diversity, with all this we can change the lives of people and we can put sport at the service of humanity, as the Olympic Charter requests.

The founder of the IOC, Pierre de Coubertin put it well: "Olympism is a destroyer of dividing walls. It calls for air and light for all."

I wish this Congress and everybody in the Olympic Movement that we are always working for building bridges and never for erecting walls, that we always follow this call for tolerance and solidarity.