



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

Thomas Bach
President

6th IWG World Conference on Women and Sport

Opening Ceremony

Speech

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Good afternoon.

It's great pleasure to be with you in Helsinki today – you are a country rightly proud of your record on gender equality.

It is appropriate that we are in a country that was the first European state to give women the vote, in 1906.

Sorry to say, but six years earlier the International Olympic Committee had already opened the Games to women athletes. A small start to be sure – and women athletes had to defy discrimination and social pressure to compete – but it demonstrates the role that the Olympics can play in breaking down walls and building bridges.

Sport has been, and continues to be, a vital tool to show that another world is possible.

Our central belief written into our Charter is that sport should be available to all, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or any other form of discrimination, including sexual orientation.

The Olympic Charter compels the IOC to “encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels”.

As a sports organisation we cannot force countries to change their legislation but what we can do is give an example to the world that a society based on these core beliefs is possible and does even work better.

Women have competed at the Games since 1900, but by London 2012 that figure was approaching parity with nearly 45 per cent of competitors being women. Indeed, some of the biggest teams, Team Finland for example, had more women members than men. The London Games also saw another significant landmark with women competing in every sport.

It is not enough to send women to the Games if girls are denied opportunities to participate in sport. On a recent trip to Saudi Arabia we heard of the progress the sporting movement is making in that country to introduce sport for young women in the education system.

We offered our help and that of our colleagues at the International Federations in introducing a plan of action – and we are happy that signals of progress are being made. The advisory Parliament has now proposed to encourage girls to play sport and even to make it part of the school curriculum. We hope that the government of Saudi Arabia will follow this recommendation and we hope that women and girls will be able to practise sport every day and of their own choice.

We are all here today to celebrate the signing of the Brighton Declaration, a call to action for governments, civil society, business, academia, research institutions and sports organisations.

Indeed, the IOC was one of the first signatories to this ground-breaking document. We have all made a lot of progress over the last 20 years, and, at the IOC, we will continue to spread our values and work towards equality.

It is not easy to change cultural norms that have been passed down from generation to generation.

It requires a team effort by players at all levels, and every step counts. But sport can help to change attitudes and show how women can and should play an equal role in sport at all levels and, by extension, in society at large.

Every step counts – that also means that the journey is not over yet.

The IOC's Women and Sport Commission, ably led for many years by Anita DeFrantz, a member of the IOC Executive Board, has been a catalyst for positive change in three priority areas: First, increasing Olympic Games participation and access to sport at the grassroots level. Second, promoting gender equality in sport. And third, increasing the number of women in sports leadership roles.

We must do more to bring women into sports leadership. We have seen what women can do on the field of play. But we definitely need their intellect, energy and creativity in the administration and management of sport as well.

Two decades ago, the IOC set a goal of having at least 20 per cent of sport decision-making positions filled by women by 2005.

The IOC has achieved that goal. And as women athletes increasingly move on from competing to taking up roles in sports administration those numbers will grow.

Our work continues, and following up on recommendations from the 5th IOC Conference on Women and Sport in Los Angeles in 2012, the IOC developed a strategic plan with a series of concrete actions to close the gender gap in sports leadership.

The new initiatives include mentoring programmes using role models from sports and sports administration, and enhanced outreach to ensure gender balance. The IOC supported training for almost 4,000 female administrators and managers between 2009 and 2012, with more training programmes to encourage self-empowerment and build leadership skills.

The IOC is also providing coaching and athletic scholarships, as well as degree programmes, for women. More than 100 female coaches, almost 500 female athletes and 47 female teams striving to participate in the 2010 Vancouver and the 2012 London Games benefited from Olympic Solidarity scholarships.

I recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations to maximise the collaboration across both our organisations. Indeed, it was UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon himself who said UN values are Olympic values. This agreement will strengthen our work in a range of fields, including quality physical education in school settings, girls' and women's empowerment and healthy life-style promotion.

The IOC is already working with UN Women. And with UNESCO and other stakeholders we plan to create an Observatory for Women, Sport and Physical Education that will help measure progress towards equality. Another new initiative

will create a digital platform to highlight successful programmes and best practices.

We are also taking action to improve our own record. Earlier this year, I announced changes to the IOC's commissions that added 22 more women and two additional female commission chairs to these important leadership panels. The female representation from Africa was increased by 50 per cent.

The IOC can and will help lead the change; but it cannot be the change alone. Gender issues are part of our Olympic Agenda 2020 discussion, where we will develop new ideas and actions, and I ask for your input into this discussion to tell us how you see our potential. I hope our IOC members will approve these changes and show sport as a great tool for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

Combating discrimination and injustice is always a team effort.

To make more progress in our quest for gender equality and open access to physical activity for girls and women worldwide, we need close cooperation with governments, educational institutions, the private sector and civil society at all levels.

Sport also has an integral role to play in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Every step counts, and being here today is also an important step. The IWG and all of you are also leading the change, and I thank you for that.

I will leave here convinced that sport can play a role in building the bridges to end discrimination and as determined as ever that sport can send this powerful message to the world.

Enjoy this Conference! Don't forget: Sport and physical activity are always about joy in life.

Enjoy the discussions and send us your recommendations as soon as possible.