

Speech by the IOC President Opening Ceremony of the 119th IOC Session Guatemala City

Mr President of the Republic,

Representatives of the Guatemalan Authorities,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to begin with some words of thanks. First, may I express my heartfelt appreciation to the Guatemalan Olympic family and the public authorities for their warm hospitality. Second, I would like not only to thank, but also to congratulate, the Guatemalan NOC, which this year celebrates its 60th anniversary: President Beltranena, best wishes to you and your team! And third, to our colleague Willi Kaltschmitt Luján, who is the king pin of this Session.

This 119th Session will cover several important topics. The IOC will elect the host city of the Olympic Winter Games in 2014, choosing from the three excellent candidates. I would like to pay tribute to the Evaluation Commission and its Chairman, Mr Chiharu Igaya, whose first-rate technical analysis will guide us in our selection.

Looking beyond 2014, I am pleased to see that six cities have already expressed an interest in hosting the 2016 Games; and the list may not yet be final. There can be no better incentive to encourage future bids than the smooth preparations in Beijing, Vancouver and London. I am impressed by the quality of work being driven by our partners at BOCOG, VANOC and LOCOG, and believe, for all three, that the Olympic Movement is on track for successful Games.

The Session will also discuss the important Olympic Movement Congress in Copenhagen in 2009. The members of the Olympic Movement, as well as the public, will be invited to make contributions to the themes and sub-themes chosen by the Congress Commission; themes which address the major challenges we must face.

The Youth Olympic Games project is also on our agenda this week. Just as the IOC has known, over our 100-plus years of existence, how to move with the times – from the advent of professionalism to the birth of television and sponsorship – so we must now adapt to meet the taste of today's young generation. For our Movement, and all that it stands for, to remain relevant into the next decade and beyond, we must find ways to keep the appeal of our event, to engender the interest of young people in the thrill of sport and reduce the skyrocketing obesity rates in developed countries that threaten their well-being. The Youth Olympic Games is just one of several ways that the IOC aims to encourage an increase in sports participation and broaden the scope of an education based on Olympic values.

On the subject of Olympic values, we have a duty to bring these values to life in all that we do in the name of the Olympic Movement around the world. Olympic values matter; they drive the entire Olympic Movement. There are many examples of how the IOC is succeeding in living its values; from our promotion of sustainable environmental programmes, for which we were honoured with the United Nations "Champions of the Earth" award, to our efforts to promote women in sport, as evidenced by the proposal to elect two women as IOC members. The number of women participating in the Beijing Games should represent more than 45 per cent of the total number of athletes, compared to 40.7 per cent in Athens.

Our work to develop societies through sport goes from strength to strength. As well as the remarkable efforts made by Olympic Solidarity, Olympafrica and Olympasia, a new project has been initiated, called "Sport for Hope." To be launched as a pilot project in Zambia, this will be a collaborative venture between the government – which will give the land to the NOC, the IOC – which will build the core infrastructure, and a dozen International Federations - which will contribute to producing their sport-specific infrastructure.

We will continue, through our sport and funding programmes, to assist those who are ravaged by war and disease, disadvantaged and marginalised. The Olympic Truce Resolution will be proposed to the United Nations General Assembly in November. The HIV/AIDS prevention programmes are working to promote awareness and fight related discrimination and stigma. Following a meeting just a few weeks ago with the United Nations, and coming on the back of the success of the joint programmes of past years, a raft of new initiatives will be launched to provide sport and education assistance to refugees in Africa, Europe and Latin America.

Allow me to finish by stressing our deep commitment to putting athletes at the centre of the Olympic Movement. Athletes are our 'raison d'être' – from meeting their training needs, to ensuring perfect playing fields and smoothly run Games, to helping them launch new careers after they retire. And of course, maintaining our complete dedication to zero tolerance for doping, working in close concert with the World Anti-Doping Agency, Organising Committees, International Federations and National Olympic Committees to fight doping as a matter of fairness and protection of athletes' health.

Dear Colleagues, it is you who deserve the credit for the IOC's actions. You guide the Executive Board and our competent administration. You also ensure that Olympism is promoted in your respective countries and organisations. We have kept the Olympic Games unique and manageable. We have delivered record revenues to assist athletes and sports organisations the world over and promote sport throughout society. We have brought Olympic values to life every day. Sport will not solve all the world's problems but sport can contribute to a better world. Thank you!