

**ATHENS 2004 ONE YEAR TO GO  
INVITATIONS SIGNING CEREMONY  
13 AUGUST 2003 - 11 a.m.**

**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE IOC PRESIDENT**

- Mrs Chairman, Honorary President for Life, Mrs Loupas (Consul of Greece), Messrs the representatives of the state and municipality, dear colleagues and friends, ladies and gentlemen,

- welcome to the IOC headquarters in Lausanne;

- I have the pleasure today to officially invite a record number of 201 National Olympic Committees to take part in the Games of the XXVIII Olympiad in Athens, exactly 366 days before the Opening ceremony;

- the Olympic Games are the celebration of the values of Olympism and of sporting ideals by the youth of the world regardless of their potential differences. They are the celebration of humanity. They create hope for a more peaceful world through sport and engender dreams and inspiration in the hearts of young people everywhere.

- the 13 August 2004 will mark the day when the Olympic Games return to the country of their birth, more than one hundred years after the first Games of the modern era in 1896 and many centuries since the Games of Ancient Greece;

- no doubt that these Games will be unique and will bring a special atmosphere that only the Greeks can create, not only because they have invented the Games, but because of their true love for sport and the Olympics and their strong historical and cultural heritage;

- Athens was awarded the Games in 1997 when the IOC felt that it was time to give back to our Greek friends what they have offered the world;

- since then, a lot of work has been achieved to give Athens an Olympic shape and I would like to thank the Organising Committee, its President and her team, the government and all the people involved in the preparations for their sustained efforts and dedication over the last 6 years. The initial delays in the preparations have been addressed effectively and we trust that everything will be ready on time to welcome the athletes, media and sport fans of the world next year;

- the organisers are working with a new found impetus to ensure that sports venues, transport infrastructures, accommodation facilities, etc. are delivered on time. All this represents an extraordinary sporting and urban legacy for future generations;

- in Athens, we will welcome for the first time the athletes from Timor Leste and Kiribati whose NOCs have been recognised by the IOC in Prague last month. Athens will see the return to competition of athletes from Afghanistan, whose NOC's suspension, imposed during the Taliban regime, has now been lifted. The IOC is also currently looking at ways to help Iraqi athletes, whose NOC has been suspended, to continue their training with the hope to have some of them take part in the Games as independent athletes should they not yet be able to represent their country in Athens;

- taking part in the Olympic Games is a dream for many athletes. Some of them train during a lifetime to get the chance to participate in this unique event. Time has come for all the athletes of the world to work hard to win their ticket to the Games. I wish them good luck in their preparations.

- in one year time, the world will be looking at Athens with great expectations. It is time for the Greeks to unite and support the 2004 Athens organisers to ensure the success of the Games. The final year's countdown has now begun. I wish you good luck. I would like now to give the floor to Mrs Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki, Chairman of the Athens 2004 Organising Committee.