



THE AUTONOMY OF THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

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I have the great pleasure and honour to present, in this august auditorium, a highly sensitive subject, which nobody is immune to, and which is still making headlines.

Although one of the fundamental principles of Olympism states that the organisation, administration and management of sport must be controlled by independent sports organisations, it is still true that exercising this autonomy is often a great challenge.

Drawing on our experience of our first quadrennium, 2005-2008, we will try to describe the various stages, which led us from conflict to resolution of the differences that, unfortunately, opposed us to the Minister of Sport – a “crisis situation” indeed. We will then present our vision of how best to seek solutions and strengthen the autonomy of a National Olympic Committee (NOC).

The aim of our presentation is to allow you to understand the difficulties, which all the main protagonists (IOC, NOCs, Ministry, media, etc.) face when considering the notion of autonomy.

It must be understood from the outset that our then-management committee had been constituted after the reform of the Djibouti NOC, at the time of the General Assembly elections on 19 January 2005.

The events surrounding our unfortunate involvement in the Athens Games, which were in fact the tip of the iceberg, had accelerated the process of reform of our NOC.

Then, in 2006, came the decree instituting the fusion of the NOC of Djibouti and the national sports committee. From the outset, we showed our willingness to make peace, favouring dialogue and cooperation, in line with the spirit of the Olympic Charter.

Letters from the Association of National Olympic Committees of Africa (ANOCA), the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) and some NOCs encouraged us to continue our quest for a peaceful outcome, with mutual respect and in conformity with the Olympic Charter.

Unfortunately, despite our efforts, we came up against a brick wall. A new management committee had been set up following elections, which was totally at odds with the Olympic Charter.

For several months, we experienced extremely tense moments, stress, allegations, pressure, wrangling, etc., which undeniably prejudiced the correct functioning of the NOC of Djibouti.

Finally, a letter from IOC President Jacques Rogge was sent to the highest authorities, underlining his deep attachment to the autonomy of the Olympic Movement, as indicated in the Olympic Charter, and inviting the leaders to take every measure necessary to guarantee respect for the autonomy of the Djiboutian Olympic and Sports Movement, subject to the imposition of sanctions.

This indeed moved things along! There was an immediate reaction, with a delegation of IOC and ANOCA members being sent to Djibouti for a final mediation. This mediation, under the leadership of ANOCA Vice-President Mustapha Baraf, had a happy outcome.

All this goes to show that a little bit of anger and a courageous gesture managed to end the deadlock.

Nevertheless, we continue to ask ourselves the following question: Why did the IOC wait so long to react in a decisive and effective manner?

Certainly the Olympic Movement encourages harmonious collaboration with the competent government authorities in order to produce, together and in an intelligent way, sports development programmes for young people in general and athletes in particular.

For all that, must the IOC take the risk of seeing some of its structures, in particular NOCs, suffer long crisis situations during which contempt is shown for their prerogatives and competences, sometimes threatening to inexorably damage their credibility? Because, paradoxical though it may seem, in this type of situation it is often the victims who are judged.

The first lesson we have learnt is to take account of the time factor. Time is a determining factor in resolving crises or conflicts.

The second thing we need to consider is the absence of a clear legal framework, protecting not only the structure, but also its members, especially the President and the Secretary General.

The third point is the need to implement a real strategy to make the public authorities aware of the importance of close collaboration between the structures of the Olympic Movement, with the common objective of the promotion of mankind and peace.

We are convinced that the IOC, the public authorities and the press are also subject to the pitfalls of a conflict situation.

The most perfect illustration is that of the press, which no longer knows who to believe and for how long.

But, it must be reiterated that the reinforcement of autonomy is also linked to transparent, democratic and direct management. Indeed, though we have rights, we must not forget that we also have duties.

To this end, we must:



- Promote regular communication with our collaborators (IOC, ANOCA, ANOC, public authorities, the press, partners, athletes, etc.) concerning all our actions;
- Implement a democratic decision-making process including all the members of the Committee, and ensure it is respected at all times, with the aim of avoiding possible internal conflicts;
- Raise awareness through the annual presentation of reports (administrative, technical and financial) through the media;
- Develop effective four-year action plans, in collaboration with the various partners (public authorities, partners, sponsors and athletes).

Concerning the development of a four-year action plan, it is important to associate the public authorities concerned and the sports federations, in order to harmonise the work and avoid misunderstandings, thereby establishing a working climate that is peaceful, serene, objective and based on mutual respect between all partners.

It is then necessary to recognise the primordial and fundamental role of the public authorities in the promotion and development of sport in each country. Combined with the efforts of the Olympic Movement, this lays a basis for collaboration, characterised by concrete, generous and effective ideas to help the athletes – collaboration based on mutual respect, which is open to dialogue and faithful to the human and universal values of Olympism.

The NOC of Djibouti will do everything possible to scrupulously endorse and promote this collaboration, which, if managed as described above, must allow us to fully preserve our autonomy. This is synonymous with cooperation with our main partners, through the execution of pertinent programme for the athletes.

We think it is clear that, if from the outset we can define the respective roles of all parties, promote a management method based on transparency and democracy which respects the rights and duties of all parties, implement a permanent, close communications strategy, and protect ourselves with a clear, persuasive legal system, not only will the Olympic Movement find the right balance with governmental authorities, but the degree of autonomy of the Olympic Movement and its structures will also be strengthened and improved.

This is our vision concerning the autonomy of the Olympic Movement on the occasion of the XIII Olympic Congress in Copenhagen. Input, no matter how modest, will make a contribution to the promotion, development and well-being of mankind.

In conclusion, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the IOC President for having invited me to speak on the occasion of this XIII Olympic Congress in Copenhagen.