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Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the International Federations (IFs) on the topic “Olympism and Youth” – a theme fundamental to the activities of the IFs.

We are very encouraged by the large number of contributors from diverse backgrounds who have participated in the formulation of papers on the three sub-themes, and I am honoured to draw on many of these contributions in presenting this subject.

Olympism and its values are primarily a philosophy of life.

You will recall that the Olympic Charter states: “Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.”

Sub-theme 4.1 – “Moving towards an active society” – poses many challenges to the Olympic Movement.

The Olympic Games, the principle activity promoting the concept of Olympism, is universally recognised as the highest profile, most watched event today, featuring the extraordinary efforts of the talented young athletes drawn from the 205 National Olympic Committees (NOCs).

Yet, we are now being told:

- firstly, that interest in the Olympic Games is declining in the youth age group;
- secondly, that there is a decline in physical activity among young people today, which is causing an increase in health problems such as obesity;
- thirdly, that sport and physical education are being reduced in schools at all age levels in an alarmingly high number of developed countries, and is non-existent in many less developed countries; and
- fourthly, that young people are spending a disproportionate amount of their leisure time indoors watching television, playing computer games or using internet-based social networking facilities such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Association of Summer Olympic International Federation (ASOIF) Director Andrew Ryan argues in his paper an interesting proposal: “The challenge is now for the Olympic and sports movement, as well as government agencies (particularly those involved in sports, health and education) to work together with the computer industry. Together, they could introduce young people to the virtual sports experience, with the aim of encouraging a natural progression into active sports participation.”

“It is time that governments and sports authorities reassess computer games and stop viewing them as a threat to health and sports participation.” He says, further, “They must explore and research ways of using this popular and growing aspect of youth culture to introduce more youngsters to sport in order to increase physical activity and sports participation.”

Sport is regarded by most people as a leisure activity, one that is often a secondary choice among many young children, who are faced with a variety of activities from which to choose.

Parents exert a major influence in this regard, often placing more emphasis on academic achievement, given the knowledge-based society we now experience. A lack of interest and involvement by parents in physical activity will mostly create a negative influence on their children.

Many contributors submit that young children need to be encouraged to participate in sport and physical activity right from the time they first commence school.

There is strong evidence to support the use of Olympians and active elite athletes as role models in encouraging young children to take up physical activity.

The support of the education authorities (both government and schools) in close cooperation with the sports organisations, and in particular national and regional bodies and clubs, is essential to ensure adequate provision of appropriate resources, including facilities, equipment, qualified coaches and administrators.

The integration with the sports community is essential to ensure the transition from school-based programmes to sports clubs/federations, so that potential sports participants are not lost. In turn, sports structures must include “sport for all” level activities and not only focus on the elite.

Herb Elliott, the great Australian Olympian, led an initiative of the Australian Olympic Committee as a post-Sydney-2000 Olympic Games legacy, called “Olympians for Youth”. The proposal was based on Olympians and elite athletes visiting primary and elementary schools across Australia, promoting the Olympic values and participating in local sports induction programmes. Regrettably, the Australian Government declined to support the proposal, but soon after launched a government-led “After School Sports Participation Programme”, costing many millions of dollars and involving the 12 most popular sports in Australia.

While an excellent initiative, the lack of coordination and particularly integration with sports clubs and National Federations (NFs) is placing at risk any longer term benefits of regular participation in organised physical activity, including organised sport.



Many of the IFs have implemented a variety of initiatives to educate and assist their NFs so that they can increase their efforts to encourage young children to participate in and aspire to higher levels of participation in sport, and to educate parents as to the positive benefits of active sports participation.

As Sir Phillip Craven, International Paralympic Committee (IPC) President, says: "Sports development must be placed at the top of each sports organisation's agenda."

And Erica Terpstra, from the Netherlands, argues: "For sports clubs to remain the first choice for sports enthusiasts, they will have to adjust to the changing times, show more flexibility and tailor their activities to the different requirements of groups and individuals."

For the establishment of grassroots sports training and competition, strong support from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), both financially and as the catalyst, in cooperation with IFs, National Federations (NFs) and governments, is essential in providing facilities, qualified coaches and officials in developing countries. The IOC led Zambia Olympic Youth Development Project "Sport for Hope", run in cooperation with six IFs, will be watched closely and hopefully will serve as a successful sports development model, which can be adapted to developing countries globally.

"Our IFs, with all their NFs, can certainly play an effective role in promoting the development of their sports at the grassroots level," says Ron Froelich of the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) and the International World Games Association (IWGA). Drawing on FIG experience, he notes: "For the youth, it should be educational and above all, fun. Sport for all should be a platform for youth programmes."

Bruno Grandi, FIG President, draws attention to the great success of the FIG Gymnaestrada, an international mass-participation event held every two years by FIG and similarly promoted by its 128 NFs.

Sub theme 4.2 poses the question: "Is competitive sport still appealing?"

Competitive sport has existed in every society for hundreds of years.

Whether the motivation for competition is fun, personal achievement, financial gain, or even national honour, the basic framework for sport is built around competition.

Athletes commit thousands of hours to training, often at great sacrifice to their education, employment, family or financial success, in order to compete successfully at club, state, national and, ultimately, international level. It is the joy, the challenge and the environment of competition that is the stimulus for athletes to devote so much time to training and the pursuit of excellence.

Many contributors contend that competitive sport has not lost its appeal because competition is an essential part of an athlete's development as it helps to promote discipline, teamwork, respect, tolerance and inclusion, and of course it certainly improves the physical fitness of all participants.

The challenge for sport is to keep pace with popular trends and interests.

All IFs organise, promote and conduct an increasing number of competitions driven by the interests of the athletes, the commercial

opportunities these extra events create and the need to cater for both men and women, from very young athletes to those of mature age.

This year, the Olympic Programme Commission (OPC) received requests from most IFs regarding the inclusion of additional events in the 2012 Olympic Games.

These requests mirror the expanded competition programme each IF is conducting at national, continental and world level.

The International Cycling Union (UCI), which experienced great success at the Beijing Olympic Games, contends that competitive sports are most definitely still appealing to young people.

Martin Gibbs writes that the UCI was extremely pleased with the introduction of BMX, and the reception the event received. The UCI had worked hard to adapt the sports format to satisfy its young participants and followers, as well as the wider Olympic Games audience, and especially television viewers.

Sports competitions around the world have received a boost from the expanded television coverage available through cable and satellite channels and, more recently, the advent of the digital revolution.

Olafur Rafnsson, the Icelandic sports leader, says: "Competitive sport also has an appeal to participants, audiences and society. Importantly, competitive sport can help grow and nurture young administrators, volunteers, referees, officials and coaches."

"Youth sports events" is the third sub-theme.

The introduction of the Youth Olympic Games (YOG), a key initiative of IOC President Jacques Rogge, has significantly raised the profile of youth sports events. The majority of Congress contributors have applauded this exciting new IOC initiative, which will be staged for the first time in Singapore, in August 2010.

All IFs have applauded the YOG initiative, given the very few multisport events available for young people and the general lack of public interest (particularly on the part of television) that each IF experiences with its own continental and world youth events.

The challenge for IFs is to tailor a competition programme within the quota numbers agreed with the IOC, and at the same time to present a programme attractive to the youth of the world, but not just duplicating existing IFs' competition programmes. Several sports will use the YOG to experiment with different, and indeed alternative, competition formats, which hopefully will lead to more youth-orientated sports competitions.

One such example is in basketball, in which the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) has won IOC support to introduce the concept of FIBA 33, a three-against-three, half-court competition. This concept provides for 38 NOCs to be represented in basketball, as opposed to 10 if the traditional basketball competition format were used, as initially proposed by the IOC.

While the YOG are expected to give a significant boost to the image and profile of youth sport, the IFs are very mindful of their obligations to work with their member NFs in ensuring that development programmes provide for carefully staged, cost-effective national and international youth competitions, respecting ethical conduct and principles.



In closing, ASOIF and the IFs are unanimous in their view that organised and competitive sport plays an important and fundamental role in society, with particular emphasis needing to be devoted to the participation of children in physical activity from the earliest age.

The IFs stand ready to work closely with governments and the Olympic Movement to realise these objectives, in the interests of a healthy mind in a healthy body.