



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

Thomas Bach
President

Speech to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

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Dear President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Mr. Pedro Agramunt,

Dear Rapporteur, Ms. Carmen Quintanilla,

Dear Members of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and privilege to address the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe today. On behalf of the International Olympic Committee, please allow me to express our thanks and gratitude for this opportunity to discuss this important topic, Sport for All, and the contribution of sport to society.

The IOC fully supports the resolution in front of you today and its recommendations on how to promote the access to sport for all people. Let me thank the Assembly for recognising the fundamental role of the IOC “in fostering equal access to sport for all”. As an organisation dedicated to making the world a better place through sport, the IOC wholeheartedly believes that sport has an essential role to play in modern society.

President Agramunt, you emphasized in your opening speech to this Assembly only a few days ago that the challenges the international community faces today can only be overcome in the spirit of dialogue and cooperation. In your speech, you eloquently explained the importance of upholding these principles, when you said: “While we must listen to everyone and give due consideration to the interests and concerns expressed, we should not lose sight of the bigger objective: overcoming divisions and working together to solve the problems we are confronted with.”

This message resonated very much with me because the IOC and the world of sport very much share these same principles. Sport unites people in respect and friendship, like few



other human activities can. Sport always builds bridges. Sport never erects walls. In our fragile world, shaken by crises and mistrust, we need this spirit of dialogue and cooperation more than ever.

Ms. Quintanilla alluded to this culture of mistrust which affects everybody and every organisation in the world. It affects the organisations in politics as well as the big organisations in sport and society. So this is a challenge we have to overcome together because we are all affected by this deep culture of mistrust and lack of dialogue.

So please accept my sincere thanks, President Agramunt, for the opportunity to join you and the Assembly in this spirit of dialogue today.

Sport has the unique power to bring people together, regardless of background, gender, culture or belief. The Olympic Games Rio 2016 reminded us all of this great unifying power of sport. The best example of this was the participation of the first-ever Refugee Olympic Team. The refugee athletes participated alongside all 11,000 athletes of the world from all 206 National Olympic Committees. They competed not as refugees but they competed as Olympic athletes, like any other Olympic Team.

The creation of the Refugee Olympic Team sent a strong message of hope and inclusion to the millions of refugees around the world. In a great sign of Olympic solidarity, these refugee athletes received an incredible reception and welcome in the Olympic family. Their participation was proof that refugees – like any other human being – are an enrichment to society just as they are an enrichment to our Olympic family.

This gives me the opportunity to highlight the great support that many of these refugee athletes received from the National Olympic Committees specifically from European countries represented here today. Three of the refugee athletes that competed in Rio de Janeiro were supported by the NOCs of Belgium, Germany and Luxembourg.

We have many other NOCs participating in the IOC programmes to assist and help refugees through sport all over Europe and beyond. Many other countries are contributing and benefiting from these programmes as well.



Let me thank everyone involved for this inspiring display of solidarity and cooperation to make this historic moment a reality. This support was proof of the power of sport to contribute to a better society.

Because of its universality and global reach, sport is a low-cost, high-impact tool to support all countries – big or small, rich or poor – in reaching their social development objectives in education, health, gender equality and many other areas.

This important role of sport in society was recently acknowledged by the United Nations. In a historic moment last year, sport was highlighted as an “important enabler” to achieve the ambitious agenda of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. As I confirmed to the UN General Assembly last month, the IOC is fully aligned and committed to work together with the UN and its Member States towards realising these important goals for social and economic progress. Our commitment comes in different forms. Making sport accessible for all is a major priority for us. The latest example of this was our announcement to build “Safe Spaces” for children to play sport throughout the world. These safe spaces will bring equal opportunity to children to play sport in a safe environment, but they also provide a platform for other civil society partners to join us to do their job, whether this is providing education or health services. It places sport at the very heart of public policy. In this way, sport can play its part in making the world a better place.

Today, let me reiterate this commitment for cooperation to all of the countries represented here in this Assembly. The IOC stands ready to support the important efforts of your Member States to promote the role of sport and to improve access to sport for all members of society.

By adopting Olympic Agenda 2020, our reform programme in the Olympic Movement, the IOC has addressed the important role of sport in society. With Olympic Agenda 2020, we have opened a dialogue with society and we invite our partners from all walks of life to join hands with us to make the world a better place for everyone.

As the resolution before us highlights, sport can be a powerful tool in particular to promote gender equality and empower women and girls. Sport gives women and girls a great opportunity to break free from negative stereotypes. Women athletes can serve as inspirational role models for young girls.



One of the key objectives of the IOC is to encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels based on the principle of gender equality. This principle is enshrined in the Olympic Charter. More recently, Olympic Agenda 2020 underscores the IOC's commitment to gender equality, by calling for a 50 per cent female participation at Olympic Games and for a stronger role for women in sport.

We are moving closer to a 50 per cent female participation at the Olympic Games. At the Olympic Games Rio 2016, we saw more women competing at the Olympic Games than ever before, accounting for 45 per cent of athletes. We are on track to increase this number at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. In fact, already at the Youth Olympic Games Buenos Aires 2018, for the first time ever we will see the same number of women and men competing at the same number of Olympic events. This means full equality in all respects.

Gender equality at the Olympic Games alone is not enough, which is why the IOC promotes gender equality outside the field of play as well. We do this by teaming up with partners who share the same vision.

For example, one of the legacies of the Olympic Games Rio 2016 is our joint initiative with UN Women called "One Win Leads to Another". With this initiative, we are supporting 2,500 young girls across the State of Rio de Janeiro by using sports programmes to empower them to become future leaders in their communities.

Gender equality is not a "women's issue". It is a basic human right of profound importance and a fundamental principle of the Olympic Charter. This is the reason why I was pleased to accept the invitation to join the HeForShe campaign of UN Women. By joining the campaign, I promised that the IOC remains committed to use sport to advance women's rights.

This is a promise that all of us gathered here need to keep, because in today's world, we simply cannot afford to let the skills of 50 per cent of the world's population be left behind – either in sport or in society.

We live in an interconnected world. Sport is in the middle of society. It is not apart from society. We do not live on an island, we live in the middle of society. This is why we are well aware that we can only make more progress together and in partnership. We do this by



helping and by asking for assistance from our partners like the UN, the private sector, civil society and, indeed, the Member States of the Council of Europe.

This is why I am pleased to be here today to reiterate that the IOC stands ready to partner with you and support the Member States in your efforts to realise the important goals of gender equality, promoting integration and sport for all.

The IOC is grateful for the longstanding cooperation that we have enjoyed with you.

Through our cooperation, we have set new global standards with regards to protecting sports competitions from manipulation and corruption. In this context, the IOC has supported the Council of Europe's Magglingen Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions from the very beginning. Therefore, I am pleased to tell you that the IOC has approved the first Olympic Movement Code on the Prevention of Manipulation of Competitions, which was implemented during the Olympic Games Rio 2016. Furthermore, as of last year the IOC has an Integrity and Compliance Hotline in place which offers an anonymous reporting mechanism for potential cases of competition manipulation and other violations. We are also proud of our cooperation with INTERPOL with whom we work together to address the risks of match-fixing, manipulation and related corruption.

This is why it is no coincidence that I am accompanied today by our Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer, Ms. Pâquerette Girard-Zappelli, who oversees our efforts in this important area.

This wide-ranging cooperation that we have in the area of fighting manipulation of sports competitions is a great example of what we can achieve by cooperating.

Even though it is not the main focus of our discussions today, please allow me to address the extremely important issue of the protection of the clean athletes and the fight against doping. First of all, my thanks go to the Member States for the great cooperation and support that they have shown over so many years. Especially over the course of the last two years, deficiencies of the World Anti-Doping Agency in the fight against doping have become apparent. It is encouraging to see that the World Anti-Doping Agency is now starting to address these deficiencies through the organisation of Think Tanks and other measures. I



strongly believe, however, that the stakeholders of WADA – that means the governments and the Olympic Movement, who are equal partners in WADA – have a great common interest and responsibility to contribute to this discussion about the future of the fight against doping. Both the governments as well as the Olympic Movement have a common objective, and that is a more robust, more efficient and more transparent WADA anti-doping system.

This is why the Olympic Movement under the leadership of the IOC outlined its strategy for a strengthened fight against doping just a few days ago. This strategy includes the call for an anti-doping system within WADA which is more independent from sports organisations as well from national interests. The strategy calls for a centralised international anti-doping system which treats all athletes from all nations equally. The strategy also calls for a harmonised legislation which makes facilitating of doping, for instance by coaches, dealers, doctors, officials or managers, a criminal offense.

To achieve this common objective of a better WADA anti-doping system, the cooperation between the governments and the Olympic Movement is vital. This is why I invite the Council of Europe and its Member States to a dialogue with the Olympic Movement on this important issue. In close coordination, cooperation and dialogue we can make great progress already at the next WADA Foundation Board meeting in November in Glasgow, where you will be represented by your Deputy Secretary General, Ms Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni.

In this respect, like with many challenges, that we all face in today's fragile world we can only make progress by joining forces, by working together.

Today's resolution on Sport for All by the Council of Europe is a great opportunity for us to join hands and unite behind such common vision. The IOC is built on the belief that we can make the world a better place through sport. But we cannot do so alone. We can only achieve our goals and put sport at the service of humanity if we work together. The Member States of this Assembly can count on the unwavering support of the IOC to realise the ambitious goals that are set out in this resolution today.

Thank you very much.