



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

Thomas Bach
President

**Opening Ceremony of the IOC Session
Gangneung, 5 February 2018
AS DELIVERED**

C'est pour moi un grand plaisir de vous accueillir tous ici pour la 132^e Session du CIO à PyeongChang. Nous voici réunis ici à l'aube d'un nouveau commencement. C'est une magnifique année olympique 2018 qui s'annonce !

Nous attendons naturellement avec impatience les Jeux Olympiques d'hiver de PyeongChang 2018. À quelques jours maintenant de la cérémonie d'ouverture, le décor est planté pour l'entrée en scène des meilleurs athlètes des sports d'hiver du monde. Ces Jeux rassemblent le monde par la passion partagée des sports d'hiver.

C'est aussi comme un nouveau commencement pour notre gracieux hôte, la République de Corée, représentée ici par son excellence le président Moon Jae-in. Bienvenue, Monsieur le président, à la Session du CIO.

Pour la première fois, la magie du sport olympique sur la neige et sur la glace va opérer en Corée. Les Jeux Olympiques d'hiver de PyeongChang 2018 ouvrent de nouveaux horizons. Ils insufflent l'esprit olympique à une nouvelle génération. Cet esprit olympique, la Corée l'a déjà connu en 1988 avec les Jeux de Séoul. Tirant parti de cet héritage, PyeongChang va écrire un nouveau chapitre extraordinaire de l'histoire olympique. PyeongChang partagera la passion du peuple coréen avec le monde. PyeongChang ralliera la jeunesse du monde aux valeurs olympiques d'excellence, d'amitié et de respect.



The Olympic Winter Games PyeongChang 2018 have allowed another new beginning on the Korean Peninsula. They have opened the door for a peaceful dialogue between the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Olympic spirit has brought two sides together that for too long were divided by mistrust and animosity. The Olympic spirit has brought real hope for a brighter future for everyone on the Korean Peninsula. The Olympic spirit has brought us all together in mutual respect and understanding.

Your Excellency, President Moon, you deserve our thanks for your faith in this Olympic spirit.

It was a long and difficult journey. With regard to the athletes from the NOC of the DPRK, in 2014, the IOC started a special programme to support them in the qualification process. At the same time we started addressing the special political situation of having the Olympic Winter Games on the Korean peninsula. For this purpose, we began preliminary talks at the highest level of government with different partners to explore the political implications. Since then, we have maintained and reinforced these contacts with all sides, in particular during the most difficult phases of political tensions. As I reported to you at our last session in Lima, we have held many discussions, always promoting a solution by dialogue and diplomacy. In all the conversations we had, the Olympic Winter Games PyeongChang 2018 were never put in doubt. On the contrary, we could always feel support. All the leaders gave us confidence in the Games, which allowed us to proceed with the preparations. Despite the sometimes worrying political circumstances, we were always standing at the side of our Korean hosts, and never talked of a Plan B.

All these efforts finally led to the "Olympic Korean Peninsula Declaration" on January 20th, at the IOC in Lausanne. On this day, the IOC took a number of exceptional decisions. As a result, we will see 22 athletes from the NOC of DPRK participate in these Olympic Winter Games. Together with athletes from the NOC of the Republic of Korea, they will march as one team, behind one flag, at the Opening Ceremony, and form a unified team in ice hockey. Coming myself from, and having competed for, a formerly divided country, I am looking forward to this with great anticipation and great emotion.

Two years ago in Rio de Janeiro, with the first ever Refugee Olympic Team, the IOC sent a message of hope to the world. Now in PyeongChang, by marching together behind one flag,



the athletes from the teams of the ROK and DPRK, will send a powerful message of peace to the world.

My thanks go to the leaders of the delegations from the NOCs of the ROK and DPRK, and to the governments of the ROK and DPRK who paved the way.

This initiative gives all parties the chance to reflect on what the future could look like, if we were all guided by this Olympic spirit.

But Korea's journey does not end here. The political tensions will not disappear overnight. Sport cannot create peace, but the Olympic Games can open the way with powerful symbols. It is our fervent wish for the Korean people, and indeed for the whole world, that this dialogue which has only just begun, will continue. It is my hope that all the political parties involved will also be inspired by this Olympic Spirit of respect and understanding, demonstrated by the athletes.

The Olympic Value of excellence is clearly shown in the organisation of these Olympic Winter Games. Here again, President Moon, you played – and play – an instrumental and essential role from the first day of your mandate. You supported and promoted these Games, making them your project. You even spent your first official holiday here in PyeongChang: this was indeed a powerful way of showing your commitment. And I know that in this way, you inspired the Korean people and in particular, the PyeongChang 2018 Organising Committee, under the able leadership of President Lee Hee-beom.

President Lee, we are aware that when you took office, you had many challenges to overcome. You have risen to those challenges in a most dynamic and efficient way. For this reason, I would like to personally thank you very much for your determination and commitment. Through the efforts of our Korean partners and friends we can confidently say today: it is time for PyeongChang. In the meantime, you have got to know me well. So it will not come as a surprise to you when, at the beginning of the Games, I say it is too early for congratulations. But I am extremely confident that I will be able to warmly congratulate the PyeongChang Organising Committee and the Korean people on the occasion of the closing ceremony. Already now I congratulate you on an Olympic record, with 92 National Olympic Committees participating – 6 of them for the very first time.



All this would not have been possible without the great work of our Coordination Commission. Therefore I would like to thank very warmly our dear colleague and friend Mrs Gunilla Lindberg and all her colleagues. I would also like to thank the International Winter Sports Federations for their great help and cooperation in delivering these Games, and in particular their chair, Gian-Franco Kasper.

The Olympic Winter Games PyeongChang 2018 give the Olympic Movement the best start to look ahead with confidence and optimism. This year, there will be many occasions, when we will see the reforms of our Olympic Agenda 2020 come to fruition.

One important reform is to strengthen the WADA-led worldwide anti-doping system. Initiated by the IOC, the newly established International Testing Agency will soon be operational. We are proud that with the establishment of the ITA, we have opened a new chapter in the fight against doping.

In addition, for the very first time at Olympic Games, both testing and sanctioning will be independent of the IOC. In today's world, it is more important than ever before to avoid even the perception of a conflict of interest. Making testing and sanctioning independent from sport organisations and national interests is therefore a vital step in that direction. This is why we call on all International Federations and major sports organisers to follow our lead.

On 5 December 2017, the IOC had to sanction the systemic manipulation of the anti-doping system in Russia, as established by the Schmid Commission. This was an unprecedented attack on the integrity of the Olympic Games. This is why the Executive Board reacted with the toughest sanction for an NOC: the suspension from the Olympic Games. There will be no Russian flag and no Russian anthem here in PyeongChang. There will be no officials from the Russian Ministry of Sport. The deputy Prime Minister and the then Deputy Minister of Sport have been excluded from any participation in all future Olympic Games for life.

On the other hand, we had to uphold the principle of individual justice to which every human being is entitled. This is why we created a pathway for clean, individual Russian athletes to compete in PyeongChang, but only under the strictest conditions. They were under the scrutiny of an independent panel, which had to establish that there is no doubt about their integrity.



Furthermore, they underwent 50 per cent more tests than the next highest NOC. As a result, three out of four of those invited athletes did not compete at Sochi.

We applied the same strict procedure after the extremely disappointing CAS decisions upholding a number of appeals. The privilege to be invited requires more than just the absence of a sanction. So we have not invited them.

In this way we want to do justice to all athletes, regardless of their passport. The invited clean Russian athletes can be ambassadors of a new generation. They can be the new role models for a change of culture in Russian sports. They can demonstrate to their fellow athletes that if you're clean you are rewarded, and not punished for the rule violations of others. Now it is up to Russia whether they want to be welcomed back to the Olympic Movement. Our Implementation Group will closely monitor the situation, and make a recommendation to the IOC Executive Board at the end of the Olympic Games.

This important issue goes to the heart of fair play, and we will discuss it fully tomorrow during our Session.

I would like to pay tribute to all those who have worked so hard on these complex issues, IOC Executive Board member Denis Oswald, former President of Switzerland, Samuel Schmid, former minister of sport of France, Valérie Fourneyron, IOC Executive Board member Nicole Hoeverts. Each of them has worked together with dedicated colleagues to ensure the protection of clean athletes, and I would like to express our gratitude to all of them.

Later this year, we will see the transformation of the concept for the Youth Olympic Games – another reform of Olympic Agenda 2020 coming to fruition. At the Youth Olympic Games Buenos Aires 2018, we will experience this new format, making the YOG more youthful, more urban, more inclusive and more female. It will be the first Olympic programme with complete gender equality, the same number of girls and boys taking part in the same number of sport events. In Buenos Aires, the population will not be invited just to watch but to be part of the Games. This will be demonstrated with the Opening Ceremony taking place in the heart of the city, rather than in a stadium, and by many other inclusive sports activities. With this new YOG concept, in Buenos Aires we are taking sport to where the people are, instead of waiting for



the people to come to sport. All the elements are in place for the YOG Buenos Aires 2018 to showcase the first Youth Olympic Games of a new era.

Another direct result of our Agenda reforms will be the very first “Olympism in Action” Forum. This will also take place in Buenos Aires, just before the YOG. This Forum will bring together a community of 2,000 stakeholders from the Olympic Movement, business, politics and civil society to discuss the most important topics for the future of sport. Together with our stakeholders, benefiting from the involvement of many young athletes, we will discuss the role of sport in today’s society. We will cover a wide range of subjects including education and health, the future of the Olympic Games, anti-doping, good governance, digitalisation and e-sports.

Speaking of e-sports, we know that we do not have the solution yet. What we can say is that the intensity that competitive “e-Sports” players show in their preparation and training is comparable to that you will find among athletes in traditional sports. This however is not the only point to be taken into consideration. The IOC is a values-based organisation. Therefore it is fundamental that we do not give recognition to an activity which infringes on our Olympic Values. There can be no place for those video games which are about killing, which glorify violence or which promote discrimination. We are looking forward to a pretty lively debate in Buenos Aires! And I guess our Korean friends will play a major role in this; e-sports being popular here.

The creation of the Olympic Channel is the most visible result of our efforts to engage with youth. So far it has been a great success, already reaching more than 1.2 billion video views, with 85 per cent of those engaging with Olympic Channel content on social media below the age of 35. (So our generation!) The channel promises to be even more successful this year. Its new cooperation deal with Snapchat will reach the perfect demographic. New projects will make the channel even more interactive, and it will benefit from the Olympic Winter Games and from the live coverage of the Youth Olympic Games.

Another journey we are on is to the Olympic Winter Games 2026. There, you the IOC members, have reformed substantially the candidature process just recently. Because of this, we are confident that we can better address the special challenges we have concerning the Olympic Winter Games: to name just a few – geographic conditions, climate change and ways



of political decision-making, with a lack of confidence in the future in a number of western countries.

At this moment, we are in the non-committal dialogue phase with a number of cities and NOCs from three continents. By concentrating on quality rather than quantity of the candidatures, we can be confident that at the next IOC Session in Buenos Aires, we will be able to formally appoint candidate cities promising excellent Olympic Winter Games 2026. These candidates will benefit from our new approach to the organisation of the Olympic Games, offering the potential of savings of five hundred million dollars for the Olympic Winter Games, and one billion dollars for the Games of the Olympiad.

As you can see, we have a full agenda this year. We can tackle this agenda with great anticipation and with confidence.

In an otherwise extremely fragile world, despite all the challenges we face, we are still an anchor of stability.

Let us all spread this positive message.

Let us all promote the unifying power of this, our Olympic spirit.