

SPEECH: THOMAS BACH

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It is indeed a great pleasure to be with you here again, as I have been since the beginning of my term as IOC President at every ANOC General Assembly; and being with you is always very special, because here in this room we're indeed all gathered from all corners of the world – all the 206 National Olympic Committees – and I even saw, yesterday, the Chef de Mission of our IOC Refugee Olympic team, Tegla Loroupe, was also present; so this is what the Olympic Movement is about. And being in Qatar, for the second time in two weeks, is also very, very special. I would have preferred to stay here these two weeks in-between the Athletics World Championships and the Beach Games and to prepare myself for participation in the Beach Games, but unfortunately Robin Mitchell did not give me an invitation or a wild card, so I had to go back to Lausanne and be ready to receive some more NOC delegations in Olympic House. But I would like to congratulate and thank Qatar for the wonderful hospitality and for the organisation of both events, these Athletics World Championships and the Beach Games.

This year we are celebrating many anniversaries, but we are also celebrating the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the IOC, which was created by Pierre de Coubertin in 1894 to prepare the first modern Olympic Games for 1896, and what a change we see.

In 1896, there were athletes from just 14 different countries, and most of them were invited individually by the IOC to take part in these Games. Today we are here, 206 National Olympic Committees created in the meantime by the IOC and all united in all our diversity. This is what shows what we have accomplished in the meantime, because our mission since 1894 has not changed, but what has dramatically changed are the ways of accomplishing this mission, and these ways are still changing day by day, and we have, therefore, to keep changing.

But what do I mean when I say the mission has not changed and the principles have not changed? Maybe it's a good moment, just one year before Tokyo, to think about this and to have a look at it from a wider perspective before, then we are entering the details of the technical preparation for Tokyo, because the technical preparations in Tokyo are going very well. They are going extremely well, and I have nothing to add to what I said to you last year – I have never seen an Olympic city being so well prepared; now just one year ahead of the Games, as Tokyo already is. And there we enjoy the broad support from all levels of government, starting from Prime Minister

Abe over the Tokyo Metropolitan Government to all the levels of the Government authorities. We have overwhelming enthusiasm in society, in support of these Games. We had 500,000 applications for about 10,000 spots in the Olympic Torch Relay, just to give you one idea.

There is an overwhelming interest in the Volunteer Programme, with over 200,000 applications from 120 countries in the world. We have an exceptional demand in Olympic tickets and so on and so on. So here we can really look forward to being received in Japan with open arms and with the fairness of the Japanese public welcoming all the athletes from all the world.

We also have seen some test events where the general impression was confirmed, but also where there were some issues which still have to be addressed and are being addressed in a way which puts athletes first. One of the major concerns there, we could see, were the challenges of heat, with the increasing temperatures there in Japan over the last couple of years and where the Organising Committee, together with a special IOC Working Group, is working hard to address these issues and how we put the interests of the athletes first. I think we have just demonstrated yesterday, where the IOC Executive Board, together with the Tokyo Organising Committee, decided to move the Olympic marathon races and the race walking events to the city of Sapporo, which is 800km north of Tokyo and five to six degrees cooler than Tokyo, in order to protect the health and the well-being of the athletes. This is a significant, and I think a very important step, but on the other hand it's just one in a series of measures the Organising Committee, together with the IOC, is undertaking to do everything in favour of athletes' health.

This principle of putting the athletes first, we all have in common, but it's not well understood by everybody, and there I would like to make an appeal to you once again: please make your efforts to support your athletes in your National Olympic Committees, in your National Federations, make it more transparent. Explain it, show it, speak with the athletes, speak with the general public and make everybody aware what you are doing, by providing so many facilities to the athletes, by giving them the opportunity to train, to have coaches, to go to competitions, to attend school, to enjoy scholarships, you name it. It's very different in each NOC and in each country, but don't be shy, explain it, because this explanation – this transparency – is absolutely necessary in order that we can keep up our principle of the distribution of the revenues the IOC generates from the Olympic Games to you and to the International Federations and not to individuals or third parties.

Out of our deep conviction, we in the IOC, we are distributing this money to you because the athletes are participating as the members of your teams in the Olympic Games. And then it is up to you to distribute this money for the sake of the development of sport in your country and for the sake of the development and support of athletes because you, you know best. The IOC could never do this because the differences among all of you, they are too big. You have different demands, different requests, different environments, a different cultural, political, economic background in all of your countries. This, we from Lausanne could never do, and there is also no one-size-fits-all model. This must be different; this must be customised to the needs and to the circumstances in your countries. But again, in order to allow us to continue with this system and in this way, make sure, show and explain that all this contribution coming from the Olympic Games is, at the end, for the benefit of your athletes and for sport in your country.

Last year in Tokyo we discussed what I am calling, not only I, but what is called 'the zeitgeist' – the tendencies we are facing in our world. And I told you that we are standing for dialogue, that we are standing for peace, that we are standing for solidarity in this world. Unfortunately, one year after, I have to repeat this message and even we may altogether have to make it stronger, because what do we see since Tokyo, since one year ago? We do not see more solidarity in this world. We do not see more dialogue. We do not see more efforts for understanding and peace. Unfortunately, we see that this world has even become more divided, that this world has even become more confrontational. That this world has even become more selfish, putting own interests first, above the interests of a worldwide community. But again, we are in sport and we are used to fighting and we know that we cannot accomplish our missions, that we cannot accomplish our goals, that we cannot win medals without standing together, without training well, without fighting hard and without then overcoming finally, all these challenges.

So this zeitgeist is telling us it is now maybe more important than ever that we stand together, that we show the unifying power of sport to this fragile and divided world and that the world maybe needs these, our unifying values, more than ever before, and this is what we are standing for altogether here in this room. [clapping]

But, in doing so, we also always have to be aware of what our mission really is. Our mission is to bring the entire world together in a peaceful competition; this is it. And what is the most important thing there, and what makes us so unique, is the entire world, is this universality and to achieve this universality, to show with the Olympic Games, the unity of humankind in all our differences. This is what makes the Olympic Games so unique, so important and so valuable.

What do we need to achieve this universality? There, first of all, we need unity. We need unity among ourselves. The same rules must apply to everyone without any discrimination. If we don't have the same rules applied to everyone, to every National Olympic Committee, to every athlete, to any sports organisation, then there is no universality anymore. If we cannot agree on common rules anymore, there is no common engagement anymore, there is no competition anymore. If everybody wants to play along by his or her own rules, it's finished with universality. So, this unity, again in all our diversity, is key to achieving our mission to achieve universality.

And there we are all united by the rules of the Olympic Charter. This Olympic Charter applies to everyone in the Olympic Movement. Everyone who wants to play a role in the Olympic Movement is bound by the Olympic Charter; and this is obvious. If we do not all follow the same World Anti-Doping Code, we have no fair competition. If we are not all following the same Code of Ethics – the IOC Code of Ethics which is part of the Olympic Charter – we have no credibility anymore. If we are not following everything in the same way, Rule 40 or Rule 50, or if we do not follow an agreement on the format of the Olympic Games, or in many stipulations, then we are not a united community anymore and then we cannot achieve universality anymore, if we would have to make special rules for special needs of special organisations or special interests.

So only this unity created by the Olympic Charter, only this unity leads and can lead us to universality and can lead us to accomplish our mission. This unity means also, that we respect and that we do not only respect, but that we embrace, diversity. It's not just respecting [the fact] that there is diversity in this world. It is about embracing diversity and understanding diversity as an enrichment to our worldwide community. This in turn means that in everything we do we must always also acknowledge that there are other approaches, that there may be other opinions, that there may be different ways to achieve the same goals so that we stay united with regard to our values, with regard to our goal to achieve our mission, but we have not only again to accept, but to embrace these differences, this diversity. And keeping this in mind also means that, in everything we do, we have to wonder how this can be perceived by somebody with a different background, with another opinion and whether this, what we are saying or doing, could lead to the fact that we are not contributing to unity in diversity, but that we are contributing to a division of our unity or our community.

This means, in very concrete terms, that we have to be politically neutral in everything we do, in everything we say. Many of you experienced in the last year since we met in Tokyo, but also before, a growing tendency to politicise sport and to use sport for political means. Many of you had problems with a visa for your athletes, with flags, with anthems, with the allocation of competitions, you name it. Many of them we could solve; but not all of them. And many we could also not solve, and we could not solve them because, for political neutrality, it needs two to tango, as in many respects in our world. It takes two to tango. It takes us to apply political neutrality and it takes the governments, politics, to respect this political neutrality because we cannot impose it. This world is run by politics and not by us, so we need to earn this respect. We need to convince these leaders to respect this political neutrality. We have to make them understand that the Olympic Games are the only event in this world which brings together the entire world in a peaceful competition, and that they should not destroy this great achievement, that they should not jeopardise this great achievement by using it for short-term political interest. And this was in fact what I tried to do just recently at the G20 Summit in Osaka, just four months ago, where this approach of the IOC was very well received and then at the end of my speech, the host, Prime Minister Abe, expressed his support and the support of the G20 for this approach of political neutrality and for the support of political neutrality by the governments and by these world leaders.

And we did the same now, just two or three weeks ago, at the United Nations General Assembly. The echo was the same. Yes, we acknowledge what we are doing and many of them are saying, "We are grateful for what you are doing because you, with the Olympic Games, you are at this moment really the only ones who still manage to keep this world somehow together and send this symbol of unity". And we need this symbol of unity. But again, it needs two to tango. We can expect this respect only if we ourselves respect this principle of political neutrality. And there I call on all of you to respect it in everything you do and whenever you are requested by your government or by other interested parties or organisations, non-governmental or governmental, to take a political stand, you have to explain to them that it is not up to sport to take political sides, but that in order to accomplish our mission of universality and in order to keep this unity, so well reflected in this room here, that we can only achieve it if we are politically neutral in everything we do and in everything we say.

So even if you think it's for the best course that you are asked, and even if yourself, you are convinced that this is the best course for the world, bear in mind that you are living in a diverse community where your neighbour sitting next to you here may think differently and may not feel

the same way and may have a different opinion. So respect your neighbour. Respect all the members of the Olympic family and don't take a political side, but concentrate on the unity of sport, concentrate on what unites us and do not concentrate on what may divide us or on those who may try to divide us. [clapping]

Another means to achieve this universality, besides this unity and this political neutrality, is solidarity. Without solidarity, without caring for each other among all the NOCs, among all the sports, there is no universality. And there, and some people, they want to explain to us that the Olympic Games have to be considered as a business model. It must be about how can we maximise profit and how can we then distribute these profits according to the economic contribution of the different stakeholders to this Olympic Games and to the economic success of this Olympic Games? And there to be extremely clear, the Olympic Games are not about making money. The Olympic Games are not about maximising revenues. The Olympic Games are there to accomplish our mission to unite the world through sport and to promote and to defend our values – this is our mission.

So for the IOC, there I'm sure I can speak on behalf of all of you because you are the guardians of this solidarity. For us, as I said, in this G20 speech, money for us is just a means to achieve our mission because if we consider the Olympic Games to be a business model, we would not have 206 National Olympic Committees and the athletes from the entire world in the Olympic Games. We would not have athletes from 33 or 28 sports in the Olympic Games. It would only be a very select group, a very select group of athletes, not even of National Olympic Committees, but a select group of athletes in a select group of some of the Olympic sports; and the Olympic Games, as we know them, and the Olympic Games as we want them, and the Olympic Games as they were conceived by Pierre de Coubertin 125 years ago, would cease to exist. We would just have another entertainment product in this world, competing with other entertainment products, but not related to any kind of values anymore; it would just be show, entertainment, without any values, without any contribution to a better society.

And therefore, we will not consider the Olympic Games to be a business model. We all in this room, we want to accomplish our mission, and to achieve this we must show solidarity among us, the NOCs. There can be no NOC putting its interests first; no sport can put its interests first. No individual can put his or her interest first. We must all put our mission first and we must all think

how we can contribute to accomplishing our mission and in doing so we must always keep solidarity and respect and unity in mind because only then we can accomplish it.

Therefore, I'm so happy to see all of you here united in your determination to accomplish this mission, to contribute to this. And we in the IOC, we are happy to work with each and every one of you, with each of the 206 National Olympic Committees, to work with you to accomplish this mission, to see how we can improve our procedures, our approaches, because this is always important. Nothing is so good that it cannot be improved. We can become more efficient in many ways. We can adapt and we need to adapt to the needs of modern times and we have to continue to do so. And what I said when I introduced Olympic Agenda five years ago, "It's about change or be changed", is still true today. This is why you see it written outside my office and outside the IOC Executive Board room in Olympic House. There you can read "Change or be changed", because it's still true and because this Olympic House – which we were inaugurating together just four months ago, where many of you were there and very much welcome – because this Olympic House is important, not just as an office building. It is also important in its symbolism and what it means for all of us, because this Olympic House, the symbolism of this Olympic House with the Greek olive tree in the middle and the dove on the top with the Olympic rings – this symbolism, this Olympic House is a commitment to our history and to our values. At the same time, this Olympic House, is one of the most sustainable buildings in the world, of which we are very proud. Being one of the most sustainable buildings in the world shows us the way into the future. So we have the commitment to our values, to our history and we have the look into the future. [clapping]

And in this spirit, in the look into the future, and the look into the future with optimism and confidence, and with all what we are standing for in sports and the Olympic Games, I invite you to build this future, this common future together. Let's work together to make Tokyo 2020 not only the greatest sports event in the world, let us work together to make Tokyo a festival of unity of humanity in all our diversity. Together, united in solidarity, we can make it, we will make it and we can be proud of it.

Thank you very much.