



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

The President

To:
IOC Honorary President
IOC Members
IOC Honorary Members
IOC Honour Members

Lausanne, 25 March 2020

Dear colleagues and friends,

Ahead of the first-ever meeting of the IOC Members by teleconference tomorrow to discuss the unprecedented situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, I would like to report to you on the events in the past hours and days that led us to the joint decision we took yesterday together with the Prime Minister of Japan, Abe Shinzo, and in consultation with the World Health Organisation (WHO), to postpone the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020.

With this worldwide coronavirus crisis, we are all living with much uncertainty. In light of this situation, the IOC had to take decisions quickly, sometimes even every day, responding to a constantly evolving environment. I hope I can count on your understanding that because of the fast-moving developments, we could not always give you all the background information on a timely basis.

When this crisis started to spread, we immediately established a Task Force in mid-February, consisting of the IOC, the WHO, the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee, the Japanese authorities and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. The focus was the impact the pandemic might have on the Olympic Games and the qualification competitions. We started to monitor the developments in particular in Japan on a daily basis. After some initial concerns, we grew more confident that the Games could be staged in a safe environment as scheduled because of the efficiency of the measures having been taken by the Japanese authorities. We were reassured by our Japanese partners and friends, from the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee, to the Prime Minister and the general public, who always made their intention clear to hold the Games starting in late July.

When the virus started to spread to more and more countries, the focus of the Task Force shifted as well. We started to think in terms of different scenarios and about mitigating measures in Japan, such as special controls, quarantines and less spectators. There were many issues on the agenda at this stage, however, the level of confidence remained high with our Japanese colleagues because the situation in the country constantly improved. For this reason, we also remained committed to holding the Games as scheduled.

We were encouraged in this by the many measures governments took around the world, limiting them to April or at the utmost May while the Olympic Games were planned for end of July. The advice of the World Health Organization (WHO) at the time was, that there was still some time needed for a full assessment.

With the rapid global spread of the virus, our focus had to centre more and more around the question of whether, the world would still be able to travel to Japan and whether Japan would be in a position to welcome the world to the Olympic Games without jeopardising the public health situation in Japan. This situation kept evolving by the day.

This is why we had to adapt our scenario planning in cooperation with the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee with regards to mitigating measures, quarantine and many other options. While we were confident that by adapting these protective and mitigating measures Japan itself would be ready in more than four months before the Games, our doubts were growing at the same time whether the world would be ready for these Olympic Games.

In this context, we called for a meeting of the IOC Executive Board on 17 March establishing the principles which would guide us in all our decisions in this dynamically evolving crises. The most important principle being to safeguard the health of the athletes and everyone involved in the Games and to contribute to the containment of the virus. With this document we reached out to all the National Olympic Committees (NOC), the International Federations (IF) and the athletes' representatives last week. All the NOCs and all the IFs in a one-by-one vote approved and supported the document, emphasizing that there was no need for any drastic decisions at this stage. In the call with over 220 athlete representatives, there was not a single athlete who called for a cancellation of the Games.

On Sunday morning, 22 March, we learned about the new alarming figures of the virus spreading around the world, particularly in Africa, where many countries were affected and obviously at the beginning of an outbreak. We also were informed of the dramatic developments in the Americas, with the virus spreading fast across the continent.

With this dynamic situation I immediately called an emergency meeting of the IOC EB for the same day, with the aim to open the door for a discussion with our Japanese partners and friends about different scenarios, in particular a postponement of the Games.

While a cancellation could have been decided by the IOC alone, it goes without saying, that a decision on a postponement could only be taken with the Organising Committee and the Japanese authorities being on board. Therefore, ahead of this EB meeting, I called TOCOG President Mori Yoshiro, who was also in contact with Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. I advised President Mori that in the Executive Board Meeting we would like to discuss a statement saying that a cancellation would not be on the IOC agenda but that we would like to open the door for a discussion with the Organising Committee about different scenarios, in particular postponement of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. Mr Mori informed me, that following his conversation with the Prime Minister, they were ready to enter into a discussion of the different scenarios, provided the IOC gave an unequivocal commitment not to cancel the Games. The EB meeting immediately following this consultation took then a decision along these lines.

Only hours after this meeting, we learned of new alarming developments, with more and more travel restrictions being imposed by public authorities around the world. During the EB meeting itself our colleague Robin Mitchell informed us that the virus was also starting to spread in Fiji and other parts of Oceania. The next day, the Director General of the WHO announced that the spreading of the virus was accelerating and that he was requesting a call with the G20 leaders to discuss this alarming new development.

Taking this into consideration, we informed TOCOG that in the phone call between Prime Minister Abe and myself, which was scheduled for the next day, we would like to already have a decision on the postponement.

We then had contact on Tuesday morning with WHO again, who said they would support such a decision given the developments in the last couple of days.

In the phone call Prime Minister Abe analysed the world health situation in the same way we had evaluated it and he proposed that the IOC should take the decision to postpone the Games, but no later than summer 2021. During the course of our friendly and fruitful discussion, I accepted his proposal, but insisted that postponement should not and cannot be a unilateral decision by the IOC because organising the Games at a different date requires the partnership and cooperation of everybody. I explained that this was the reason why the IOC had not taken such a unilateral decision before this phone call. Prime Minister Abe immediately agreed to this and also accepted our offers to have the Olympic flame staying in Japan until the opening of the Games and to keep the name Olympic Games Tokyo 2020.

Immediately following this telephone conversation the Executive Board approved this agreement.

This result would not have been possible without the cooperation and support of so many: You, the IOC Members, in particular the members of the EB, the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee, the IFs, the NOCs, the IOC Athletes' Commission and many athletes around the world, our partners and stakeholders and last but not least the staff of the IOC. All of you and them I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart for all the solidarity, flexibility, support and commitment you and they have been showing in these challenging times.

Now we have another unprecedented challenge ahead of us – the organisation of the postponed Olympic Games. This is a first ever in our long Olympic history. It will be a huge undertaking because, as you are well aware, the Olympic Games are the most complex peaceful event on this planet.

This new situation will need all our solidarity, creativity, determination and flexibility. We all will need to make sacrifices and compromises. We have already created a Task Force which gave itself the symbolic name “Here we go” and is already working in this true Olympic spirit.

To exchange with you, my dear friends and colleagues, to listen to your questions, comments and ideas about this unprecedented situation we will hold another unprecedented event tomorrow, with the first-ever meeting of all IOC Members by teleconference. I am looking forward to have as many of you as possible on the line and to hear at least your voice in a time when circumstances unfortunately prevent us from seeing each other personally.

I hope very much that I can count on your full support also in these unprecedented times.

Looking forward to tomorrow and wishing you and your families good health and all the very best, I remain,

Yours sincerely

Thomas A. L.