

BAN KI-MOON

Secretary-General of the United Nations



ORIGINAL TEXT IN ENGLISH

Mr President of the International Olympic Committee, Jacques Rogge, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very happy to be among you today. It is a real pleasure for me. It is also a great honour.

I feel at home among you.

You come from every corner of the world. You represent different nations... yet you have numerous interests in common.

It is a little like being at the United Nations!

I am here in Copenhagen for two very important reasons.

I am here because this Congress is the ideal opportunity to examine the means of strengthening the collaboration between the UN and the Olympic Movement.

I have also come to promote the United Nations Conference on Climate Change, which will take place here in Copenhagen in a little more than two months.

These two objectives are linked.

The Olympic Movement is contributing more and more to the protection of the environment. The fight against climate change urgently needs your support. I will tell you why in a moment.

But first, let me say how much I welcome our growing cooperation.

Just last month, the General Assembly, for the first time, took steps to pave the way for IOC representatives to participate in its official meetings. If all goes well, this could start by the end of the year.

But our partnership goes well beyond the meeting rooms in New York.

It extends across the world, from national capitals to war zones.

It carries out scores of projects to help refugees, educate children and protect our planet.

These efforts are underpinned by shared principles: non-discrimination, sustainability, universality and solidarity. Olympic principles are United Nations principles.

Olympians also have tremendous capacity to inspire. At a UN-run camp in Nepal, where young refugee girls were trying to play volleyball with broken equipment, three gold-medal Japanese athletes visited with professional balls and personal lessons. The girls were overjoyed.

This is just one of countless examples.

My Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace, Wilfried Lemke, has a simple philosophy: "Sport is a universal language that unites people and builds bridges."

Indeed, sports can be found anywhere, even in war-ravaged places where all hope seems lost.

Suddenly, a ball appears, made out of plastic bags. Or a stick used as a bat.

Suddenly, a dirty street is transformed into a playing field.

We have seen this in poor townships in South Africa and slums in Nairobi, where UN initiatives are helping children benefit from sports.

In the Middle East, organised sports are helping children devastated by violence to learn positive social values.

Three years ago, when the United Nations helped to organise the Democratic Republic of the Congo's first elections in 45 years, the IOC teamed up with peacekeepers to hold "Peace Games" that helped promote calm.

I thank Dr Rogge for backing these sports-for-peace initiatives.

More and more people around the world understand the value of such efforts.

This is why the vast majority of UN member countries sponsor the annual General Assembly resolution calling for an Olympic Truce. This is one of the most widely sponsored General Assembly measures, and it is always adopted unanimously. It may seem impossible to silence all the guns on the planet, but we must try – we must be as determined as Olympic champions.

We must use the potential of sports to help people who are marginalised, including people with disabilities. From the Olympics to the Paralympics to the Special Olympics, we hear stories of people who have fought the odds and won.

I hope that all sports will strive to provide equal access to everyone, in keeping with the landmark United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We must also join forces to combat the negative aspects of sports. Doping, human rights abuses, violence and corruption directly contradict the ideals of the Olympic Movement and the United Nations. We need positive role models who reject this behaviour and show children how to be true winners in life. I am grateful to the leading Olympic athletes who have signed on as UN goodwill ambassadors.

Our work together is especially important as the global economic crisis continues to inflict suffering. The International Labour Organization is working with the IOC to support job training. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) are organising sports education programmes. We are also joining hands to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS.

Athletics are also central to our work to promote gender equality. I commend the IOC and the organisers of the 2010 Youth Olympic Games in Singapore for their commitment to equal representation of male and female athletes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is a wide-ranging field of play. But there is perhaps no area where we cooperate more closely than in protecting our global environment – one of my top priorities as Secretary-General.

To push for a global climate deal, I have sounded the alarm from Antarctica to the Arctic Rim, from the dry plains of Africa to the steppes of Mongolia.

Last month in New York, I convened the largest-ever gathering of world leaders on climate change. More than 100 Heads of State and Government attended.

I continue to press them to hammer out an agreement. But we also need citizens to do their part – on climate and on the environment.

The IOC's agenda for Sport and Environment is a welcome effort in the right direction. The concept of 'Green Games' is now a reality. That is why the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) named President Rogge a "Champion of the Earth."

Last summer's Beijing Olympics set new records. More than a fifth of all energy used was renewable. And people everywhere learned about the importance of protecting the environment.

I am pleased that the cities of Vancouver and London, are committed to greening the games they will host in 2010 and 2012 respectively.

I am also encouraged that the Russian government, in preparing for the 2014 winter games in Sochi, has already responded to a recommendation from UNEP to relocate facilities away from a protected wilderness area.

Yesterday, you chose a city to host the 2016 Olympics. I congratulate Rio de Janeiro for its successful bid. Parabéns!

In a few weeks, an Olympics of another sort will take place right here in Copenhagen. The nations of the world will gather to seal a deal on climate change. That will take an Olympian effort. We are all running a race against time.

Last month's summit laid a solid foundation for this effort. World leaders all said they want a deal, and that they will work for it.

The summit also heard important commitments from Japan, China, the European Union and many others.

I appreciate this progress. But I am keeping up the pressure.

This is the pre-eminent global challenge of our time.

Tackling climate change can set us on the road to peace and prosperity for all. But half-measures or business-as-usual will set the stage for catastrophe.

I will continue engaging leaders for success at the December Conference. I appeal to you to use your positions and your influence to do your part.

Friends,

I must confess I am a bit awed speaking before you. Many of you are athletes, or former athletes, and all of you know more about sports than I do.

If you asked me to jog around this conference room, I would probably run out of breath.

But when it comes to fighting for our shared global goals – for a world that is cleaner, healthier, more peaceful and more prosperous – I will sprint like an Olympian.

I will ski the steepest trail.

I will run and run and never stop until we reach the finish line.

I am counting on all of you to join me. We must go for the gold.

Thank you.