



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

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President

**Opening remarks to the 134th IOC Session
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While last Sunday the focus of our ceremony was the inauguration of Olympic House, today we should look at the 125 years of existence of the International Olympic Committee, which we are celebrating these days.

125 years ago, our founder Pierre de Coubertin revived a revolutionary idea of bringing all of humankind together in peace through sport.

When he created the International Olympic Committee and revived the idea of the Olympic Games on the 23rd of June 1894, this concept that sport could bring together all people in peaceful competition was seen by many of his contemporaries as very naïve.

In fact, his idea ran counter to the prevailing spirit of his time: nationalism, imperialism and colonial rivalry culminating in brutal wars. Against this backdrop, the notion that sport can build understanding and even peace among people and nations seemed hopelessly idealistic.

Always an idealist, one could even say a dreamer, Coubertin never gave up on his Olympic dream. Above all else, he was a visionary, when he said, and I quote: “Should the institution of the Olympic Games prosper, it can become a potent factor in securing universal peace.” End of quote.

Today, 125 years later, his dream lives on and it is stronger than ever.

We see in all clarity today, that his Olympic dream has stood the test of time. As we are celebrating this 125th anniversary, we are forever grateful for his vision. We are grateful that he restored this precious ancient Greek heritage of the Olympic Games. Thanks to him, the important values the Olympic Games stand for, live on for the benefit of humankind.

Our mission today is to adapt this heritage to our modern age.



Two days ago, we paid tribute to our heritage during the memorable 125th anniversary celebrations of the founding of the IOC. We can all take pride in the fact that our newly inaugurated Olympic House was rated by the US Green Building Council as one of the most sustainable buildings in the world. Such an acknowledgement gives us even more motivation to change and adapt our precious heritage to our times.

Yesterday, we took the latest step to carry our heritage into the future. With the election of the host for the Olympic Winter Games 2026 we have shown how we are adapting the Olympic Games to our modern age. We have revolutionised the candidature procedure and the organisation of Olympic Games from start to finish. Our congratulations go to our friends from Milan-Cortina for a fantastic project that exemplifies this new spirit. In fact, our recognition also goes to Stockholm-Åre, because both candidates have embraced this new approach wholeheartedly, making their vision for the Olympic Games align with the long-term needs of their cities and regions. Our thanks go to both candidates for having shown the way for a new model of hosting Olympic Winter Games with sustainability and feasibility at their heart.

If Coubertin would be with us today, at our 134th IOC Session in his beloved Lausanne, what would he think of the state of the Olympic Movement?

Perhaps he would be struck by the great stability the Olympic Movement enjoys today in our fragile world. In his time, it would have been unthinkable to have Olympic hosts confirmed eleven years in advance of the Games. Back then, it would have been inconceivable to have interest to host Olympic Games even seventeen years in advance, as we currently do with 2032 and even 2036. This early interest shows the growing global relevance of the Olympic Games in our times.

He might even be a little bit envious of our financial stability. With the latest signing of The Coca-Cola Company and China Mengniu Dairy Company from 2021 to 2032, we have just announced the first-ever joint TOP Partnership agreement. By signing this agreement, many have helped. But I guess also the Olympic spirit must have helped. Because getting together, forming such a partnership between an iconic American brand with a young Chinese brand must be inspired by the Olympic spirit, in these days we are living in and in these situations which we have to address in the world. This is just another example of the unifying power of sport. This agreement also means that our relationship with Coca-Cola, which began in 1928,



three years after Pierre de Coubertin left the Presidency of the IOC, will be the longest-ever continuous Olympic sponsorship in history. Because by 2032 we will have reached 104 years of partnership with Coca-Cola. This is a truly remarkable achievement and was not easy at all to realise. There were many ups and down, and I must say sometimes more downs than ups, in this procedure. It was extremely difficult to get these two partners together, to have it fit into our TOP Programme and to respect all the rights of interested parties. These are just some of the obstacles we had to overcome. This is why I would like to thank IOC Vice-President, my dear colleague and friend, Mr. Yu Zaiqing, who had an important task and made an invaluable contribution to make this historic agreement a reality. Thank you very much Mr. Yu.

And this is only the latest example of such long-term agreements, both with Rights Holding Broadcasters and TOP Partners, with many of them already extending until 2032. Yes, such long-term agreements give us stability. But they show, and this may be even more valuable than all the financial stability, they show that our values and our management of the Olympic Games are resonating around the world. If these companies would not trust us, they would never commit themselves to us for such long periods.

It is this financial stability that allows us to support sport worldwide, to invest 1.5 billion US dollars every year in sport across the globe. This figure will even rise in the next Olympiad. In our fast-changing and volatile world we are living in, this great stability is perhaps the strongest currency you can have.

But overall, and most importantly, we are a values-based organisation. Therefore, we see our financial stability and our commercial success not as an end in itself. Money is just a means to pursue our wider social mission of promoting sport around the world. This differentiates us from for-profit businesses with purely commercial interests.

We are all benefiting from this stability: athletes, National Olympic Committees, International Federations and Organising Committees. It gives us the foundation to pursue our mission and to carry it to the future.

But as Coubertin, as a visionary, would surely remind us, we cannot take this stability for granted. In our world, change is the only constant.



When we adopted the Olympic Agenda 2020 reforms, the theme was: To change, or to be changed.

This still holds true today.

There are also other similarities between our world today and the time of Coubertin.

Then as now, humankind is living in an age when the world is drifting apart. Hardly a day goes by without news of rising nationalism, of mistrust and protectionism. In an age of global crises, we are seeing more isolation, more separation, more confrontation and unfortunately less cooperation.

The zeitgeist of Coubertin's time is similar to the one today. In many respects, we are facing the same tensions and the same challenges to our values as Coubertin did 125 years ago.

This also means on the other hand that the values of the Olympic Games are as relevant now as they were then.

If he is watching us, I believe that he would feel very proud that the Olympic Games today are the only event that brings the entire world together in solidarity and peaceful competition.

At the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, athletes from 14 countries took part. At the Olympic Games today, we have athletes from all 206 National Olympic Committees and the IOC Refugee Olympic Team who are competitors in sport, while living peacefully together under the same roof of the Olympic Village.

Without a doubt, Coubertin would be impressed with this universality of the Olympic Games he created.

But I guess, he would also have questions for us.

How are you changing to adapt the Olympic Movement to your world?

How are you carrying the Olympic Values into the future?



To these questions, we can answer him with our vision, as defined by Olympic Agenda 2020.

All recommendations of Olympic Agenda 2020, which you unanimously approved at the time, have one overarching goal: to strengthen and even enhance the relevance of the Olympic Games in our world today. We do so by promoting our values of peace and solidarity, which were so central to his vision when he revived the Olympic Games. These values continue to be at the heart of everything we do.

Today, Coubertin's vision of making the world a better place through sport is exemplified by our partnership with the United Nations. Our social mission has been acknowledged by the UN, in particular through a Memorandum of Understanding with the IOC. This created a formal framework for collaboration in many important areas where sport can promote peace and social development. The historic resolution by the UN General Assembly recognising the autonomy of sport and the leadership role of the IOC is another milestone in our partnership.

This leadership role of the IOC has been confirmed once more, just a couple of days ago, by the invitation to address the G20 Leaders' Summit on Friday this week in Osaka, Japan. In this context, I would like to thank the host of this summit very much, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan for this invitation which honours the entire Olympic Movement.

Sport was highlighted by the UN as an "important enabler" to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The global reach and cross-cutting nature of sport allows it to address several of the goals, ranging from health, the environment, education, gender equality, to peace-building and many more.

All these examples show that the relevance of sport for society today is truly recognised by the international community.

Perhaps the best modern-day expression of how we promote a peaceful world is through the Olympic Truce Resolution of the UN. In fact, this year marks the 25th anniversary since the IOC and the UN revived the ancient Greek tradition. Since 1994, the UN has adopted a resolution



before each edition of the Olympic Games, calling on all nations of the world for a cessation of hostilities for the Games to take place in peace.

Most recently, the resolution “Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal” was adopted ahead of the Olympic Winter Games PyeongChang 2018, with a record number of UN Member States co-sponsoring the resolution. This was arguably the most important Olympic Truce Resolution because it was adopted at a critical point in time, when the Games themselves were at risk.

If Coubertin were among us today, I think he would be pleased to see how we are putting sport at the service for the peaceful development of humankind in this way.

The enduring power of the Olympic Games he created is its universality. The Olympic Games are the only event with the power to bring the entire world together in peaceful competition. But we can only bring the entire world together at the Olympic Games if everyone can participate. We can only achieve this mission by showing respect and solidarity for one another.

This is why the solidarity model is at the heart of the IOC’s activities. Only through this solidarity can the universality of the Olympic Games be realised.

This explains why the IOC redistributes 90 per cent of its revenue for the benefit of the athletes worldwide. In other words, our money goes to the Organising Committees who make the Games possible and give the athletes that unique stage to shine; it goes to the Olympic teams consisting of the athletes, that means the National Olympic Committees, to support their national athletes; and it goes to the International Federations to support the athletes and the development of their sport. With this solidarity model, the equivalent of 5 billion US dollars in the four years of an Olympiad goes to support athletes and sport organisations worldwide.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that we did not always do our best to make the solidarity model transparent and understandable enough to the athletes and the wider public. To address this, we are working on a set of measures that will demonstrate how we can create more opportunities within the framework of the solidarity model. In this respect, we are working with the NOCs and the IFs to strengthen this solidarity model for the benefit of the athletes,



because they know the best, they know better than us, how to support their athletes in their countries and in their sports. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for this.

We are very happy that at the recent International Athletes' Forum, the athletes' representatives recognised the central importance of the solidarity model for them. This Forum was the biggest-ever gathering of legitimate athlete representatives and in the final recommendations, they called for continued support to strengthen this model.

These athletes realise that if the criterion for distribution of the money generated with the Olympic Games would be the individual contribution of an athlete, or a team, or a sport to the commercial success of the Olympic Games, then we could not achieve our global mission of uniting the entire world anymore.

If that were the case, we can be sure that we would not have 33 Olympic sports in Tokyo 2020 and seven in Beijing 2022, but only a much more limited number. We would not have athletes from all 206 National Olympic Committees participating in the Olympic Games, but only a much more limited number.

The universality of the Olympic Games can only happen when every NOC, every sport, and every athlete shares this respect and solidarity.

To maintain this universality and solidarity of the Olympic Games, we need strong partners. We need strong International Federations to promote and develop their sports. We need strong National Olympic Committees to promote and develop the national athletes.

This is why I thank all the IFs and all the NOCs for their ongoing support and commitment for the Olympic Movement. They are standing with us in times of reforms and change brought about by Olympic Agenda 2020. They are translating these reforms into their respective areas and for this I want to thank and congratulate all of them.

This is all the more important because the solidarity model is under threat today.

It is challenged by a purely market-based approach to sport that ignores the values we stand for. The International Federations experience this through the growing influence of commercial



event organisers. These commercial sports companies operate like regular for-profit businesses.

This is legitimate. The fact that we see the rise of such commercial sport companies shows the ever-growing relevance of sport in society. They just want to have a piece of the cake, for not the say the money, or the cherries of the cake.

On the one hand, they are bringing fresh ideas and inspire us how sport can be presented in new and innovative ways, appealing to youth and all generations. Therefore, they also deserve a profit.

But what is not fair at all, is that more and more public authorities are ignoring the differences between these purely commercial companies and us, as values-based organisations.

The National Olympic Committees are experiencing this challenge as well. They are faced with the difficult task of how to balance the interests of individual athletes against the need to support all athletes from all sports. They have to deal with interest- and pressure groups. In some countries and some sports, there are even clubs who literally own athletes. Also here we see how narrow self-interest is challenging the solidarity model.

Unfortunately, we see this tension not only in sport, but in society at large. Whether it is economic, social or national interest, our zeitgeist is increasingly one of narrow self-interest gaining ground over solidarity, over shared values, and over common rules.

Let us remember that the reason why sport was recognised as an important enabler to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals was not because of the profit companies are making with sport. It was recognised because of our investment, our investment in the youth, because of our investment in education, because of our volunteers, because of our solidarity model, because we are a values-based organisation. This was the reason for the UN.

This is why are calling on public authorities to take this distinction into consideration whenever they take decisions that affect sport. We are calling on them to respect our social mission, to respect our solidarity model and to recognise our invaluable contribution to society.



This goes to the heart of our identity. This is who we are. We stand for values. We organise competitions for all athletes from all sports, regardless if these competitions are commercially successful or not. We are not cherry picking.

The Olympic values – this is what defines us as a community. When our values are under threat like they are, we make it even clearer for what we stand: We stand for solidarity. We stand for universality. We stand for peace. We stand for dialogue. We stand for diversity. We stand for respect. We stand against any form of discrimination in the sporting world.

In his time, Coubertin was already aware of the central importance of values for sport. He once said and I quote: “Sport without values is only a military parade”. End of quote.

Today I would say: sport without values is just entertainment. Yes, Olympic sport must be entertaining, but it must not be just entertainment.

Part of the zeitgeist we are facing, and also Coubertin was facing in his time, is a shift from healthy patriotism to nationalism. A healthy patriotism is something that we appreciate in sport because you support your athletes while respecting your competitors. Nationalism, however, means that you put your national athletes above all others and even look down on other competitors. This is something we do not want to see in sport. This is a trend against which we need to take a firm stance, because we stand against any form of discrimination in sport. It is only this principle of non-discrimination that allows sport to promote peace and understanding among all people.

Coubertin’s Olympic Values – this is what defines us as a community. As we celebrate our 125th anniversary, we can be proud to belong to this community. It is built on the timeless values of peace and universality. We can be proud to belong to this community of Olympic Values because we are the only ones who can unite the world in all its diversity. One world, living peacefully together, with one rule for everyone.

We know that our values are not shared by everyone in this world. But a disregard of our Olympic ideals does not negate their inherent value. On the contrary. It demonstrates the importance of our mission, to continue to strive towards upholding the values and ideals in a world where peace and solidarity are under threat.



Does this mean that we have always in these 125 years got it right? Of course not. No organisation and no human being in the world can claim to be always right or to do always the right thing.

Ideals are, by definition, impossible to achieve. Over the course of 125 years of our existence, there have been moments when we have fallen short of our ideals and values.

But as we are in sport, that only encourages us to strive even harder. As athletes, we know that, if you do not make it at first, try again. And again. Because it is only by striving that we make progress, to go beyond and achieve the impossible.

Therefore, our thinking should not be determined by the cynics who choose to only look at challenges and shortcomings. As a values-based organisation, as a community of shared values, our aim must always be to strive towards our ideals.

Already in his time, Coubertin the idealist, saw the Olympic Values challenged by a cynical world. He said, and I quote: "We must not be surprised if our ideals still lie beyond those of many people, nor if they run counter to the interests of many. Independent and united, we have faith in ourselves." End of quote.

If Coubertin were with us today, I think he would be pleased to see how relevant his Olympic dream is today. But knowing of his idealism I also know that he would also have a message for us: Keep striving. Keep changing.

In this Olympic spirit, let us stay united, as he said, let us stay united and with faith in ourselves, striving for even more change and excellence in the next 125 years and beyond.