



INTERNATIONAL  
OLYMPIC  
COMMITTEE

**Thomas Bach**  
President

**New Leaders Forum**  
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Thank you for the invitation to join this important “New Leaders Forum”. When we met the last time two years ago in Vilnius, this conference had a much more complicated name. It was called the “Forum for Advancing Women in Leadership Roles in Europe”. Also with regards to the name, we have made good progress. The new focus is much more on empowering young leaders to lead the change on gender equality in sport. This change is a great reflection of the progress that you have made since Vilnius.

The conference two years ago was a call to action to improve gender equality. In fact, the “Vilnius Commitment to Change” called on members of the European Olympic movement to implement the many existing recommendations. Today we have advanced the discourse to “how” and “when” gender equality will finally be a reality. This is a maybe subtle but nevertheless a powerful difference.

This New Leaders Forum today is a concrete example of putting best practise into action. Here we have 30 young leaders in sport from across all of Europe, who are committed to leading the change toward gender equality. This is exactly the kind of practical action that we need. To close the gender gap, we need the buy-in from the entire organisation, starting with the leadership. Because without a commitment from the top, change will not happen.

This is why I congratulate the European Olympic Committees and in particular the Finnish Olympic Committee for this wonderful initiative.

Change starts at the top – this is in fact one of the conclusions and key recommendations of the recent IOC Gender Equality Review Project. This project put forward 25 concrete recommendations on how to create more opportunities for women to contribute in decision-making roles. I would like to thank my IOC colleagues Marisol Casado and Lydia Nsekera, who are here with us today, for leading this project in such an excellent way. We are now seeing, through initiatives like the New Leaders programme, how these recommendations are being put into action across the Olympic family, benefiting all the International Federations, National Olympic Committees and most importantly the athletes themselves.



At the IOC, we are continuing our many actions for gender equality. On the field of play, we have achieved gender equality. At the Youth Olympic Games Buenos Aires 2018 we had the first-ever Olympic sports programme with complete gender equality, a 50-50 balance, with the same number of male and female athletes competing in the same number of sports and events. Likewise, the upcoming Winter Youth Olympic Games Lausanne 2020 will be the first winter edition with complete gender equality as well.

When the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 get underway, we will have also achieved gender-balance at the Olympic Games, with the highest-ever representation of female athletes in Olympic history at close to 49 per cent. What is more, we have modified the Olympic competition schedule to also balance the visibility of men and women's events in the programme. The small difference that remains to reach the 50:50 balance is only because of the qualification of some teams for the female sports. In fact, when I explained this to the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, she gave me permission to say that we have achieved gender balance at the Olympic Games. With her permission, I therefore take the liberty to also speak of gender equality with regards to the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 already, because this sends a strong signal to all sports organisations around the world.

Off the field of play, we are not there yet, but we are also putting our commitment into action. Today we have a historic high of over 45 per cent female members on IOC Commissions. Since 2013, as a result of Olympic Agenda 2020, female participation in the IOC Commissions has more than doubled. There I also have the opportunity to congratulate the newly appointed Chair of the IOC Coordination Commission for the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026, our colleague Sari Essayah, who presides over a completely gender balanced Commission. She is joined here today by Emma Terho who also has very important tasks in the IOC not only as part of the IOC Athletes' Commission, but she is also a member of the special working group that is monitoring the good governance progress in the International Boxing Association. They are joined here today by two more IOC members, Princess Nora of Liechtenstein and Prince Feisal Al Hussein of Jordan, whom I would like to recognise as well.

The number of female IOC members is currently at 35 per cent, up from 21 per cent at the start of my presidency.



Another way in which we are changing the composition of IOC Commissions is by giving the young generation a voice. We are doing so by including a growing number of IOC Young Leaders, a group of inspiring young people from around the world who are using sport for positive change in their communities. In fact, with the latest composition of IOC Commissions, we have more than doubled the number of Young Leaders who are Commission members. As you know from your New Leaders initiative, it is crucial to give young people a voice, a voice if we want to stay relevant in today's society. By empowering tomorrow's leaders, young leaders just like you, we give you the opportunity to shape your future but also to ensure and shape our future.

We know that we can only make progress in partnership with others. If we want to promote gender equality and empower women to be successful across the Olympic Movement, not only as athletes, but also as coaches, officials and leaders, then everyone has a role to play: the IFs, the NOCs, the athletes and all other partners and stakeholders that are gathered here in this room today.

This is why it is so encouraging to see many IFs and NOCs already putting the recommendations of the IOC Gender Equality Review Project into action. Many of you present here today are leading the way with important initiatives for gender equality. The International Ski Federation, World Rugby, the NOC of Lithuania are only a few that have taken the 25 recommendations on board in an excellent way and made successful changes.

With initiatives like these and the New Leaders programme, we have indeed started to shift the discussion beyond aspiration and towards action.

Yes, we have made progress. Yes, we can be proud of this. No, we are not complacent, there is still a lot to do. When the IOC conducted a survey for NOCs on gender equality this summer, we found that over 50 per cent from the European NOCs were actively engaged in promoting gender equality. Another 30 per cent wanted advice on how to promote women and advance gender equality. While on the one hand it is encouraging to see that for more than half of the European NOCs gender equality has become a priority, we must also on the other hand recognise that there is still a significant number of NOCs where this unfortunately is not the case.

We cannot be complacent. We have to continue to be ambitious.



This is why the approval of the EOC gender equality strategy is such a vital step to start and turn those numbers around. The recent amendments to the EOC Constitution to advance gender equality in line with the IOC Gender Equality Review Projects is a very positive step in this direction. I can only encourage you to continue on this path. In this respect, I would like to commend the excellent work of the EOC's Gender Equality Committee, under the able leadership of Sarah Keane. With these changes in place, you have a solid foundation to promote women in leadership roles, both on and off the field of play.

You also have a strong core of European NOCs which already are leading by example and can already offer advice and best practices on how to realise the IOC Gender Equality Review Project.

Gender equality and promoting women in sport is not only an issue of fairness. It is for sure not some kind of generous present. It is about attracting the best talent. It is the smart thing to do and it is the right thing to do. Gender equality is part of good governance of any organisation. In today's world, no organisation, institution or country can afford to leave the skills of 50 per cent of the population behind – either in sport or in society at large.

Looking around the room today, with the many impressive young leaders already leading the change, I am confident about your determination and your dedication. I applaud and thank you for your courage.

To achieve gender equality, we need to work together, we need together to lead the change. On this journey of change, you can always count on the support of the IOC as a partner by your side. Because we are continuing to follow our motto which we chose to introduce our Olympic Agenda 2020: to change or to be changed. Whenever you undertake change for the better, the IOC will always be at your side.

In this Olympic spirit of progress and change, I wish you fruitful discussions and a successful conference.