



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

Thomas Bach
President

Opening speech at the 137th IOC Session
10 March 2021

Cher Président d'honneur,

Chers amis et collègues,

Dear friends and colleagues,

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening, to all of you my dear friends and colleagues, IOC Members, in whatever time zone you may be right now. Welcome to this second remote IOC Session in Olympic history. A very warm welcome also to our friends from the National Olympic Committees, the International Federations and to the athletes' representatives.

A warm welcome to all the guests and media representatives who are following us via livestream.

We had originally planned to come together in Athens for this IOC Session. But because of the global coronavirus pandemic, we once again have to meet online today. The fact that we cannot gather in Greece, the birthplace and spiritual home of our Olympic Movement, comes as a great disappointment to all of us.

We all miss our Greek friends and we know that they miss us as well. This is why I would like to first of all thank our Greek partners, in particular the Hellenic Olympic Committee and its President, our colleague and friend Spyros Capralos, for their understanding and the great work they had already done in preparation for the IOC Session.

With this, I hand over to our dear friend, Spyros Capralos, who is at an iconic location in Athens.

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Efharisto poli! Thank you, Spyros, and thank you to our Greek friends.



At our last Session in July 2020, we could already see that during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, we were able to strengthen the relevance of sport and our values in society. During uncertain times of social distancing and lockdowns, we were able to make the contribution of sport to public health obvious to so many. The crisis has also put the social and economic significance of sport into the spotlight.

When the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the “Sport as an enabler of sustainable development” resolution on 1st of December 2020, it summed up the support that we got from the international community: from the UN, the World Health Organization, and many more.

This resolution is so significant because it also recognises the important role of sport in post-COVID-19 recovery plans. It specifically calls on the UN Member States to include sport and physical activity in their recovery plans and their national development strategies.

The resolution also stands out for welcoming “with great appreciation” all upcoming Olympic and Paralympic Games. The UN explicitly recognises and affirms the invaluable contribution of the Olympic Movement to promote peace and development.

This appreciation for the relevance of the Olympic Games in our fragile world today was also reflected at the G20 Leaders’ Summit in November 2020 to which the IOC was invited for the second consecutive time. Following our presentation, the G20 Leaders expressed in the final declaration their strong support for the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 and the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022.

Encouraged by this support, the IOC is working at full speed together with our Japanese partners and friends to make the postponed Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 a safe manifestation of peace, solidarity and resilience of humankind in overcoming the pandemic.

The Organising Committee will give us a detailed overview on the progress of the preparations tomorrow. Our shared top priority was, is and remains safe and secure Olympic Games for everyone: the athletes and all participants, as well as our gracious hosts the Japanese people to whom we owe already now all our respect. Therefore, the IOC is standing shoulder to shoulder at the side of our Japanese partners and friends, without any kind of reservation.



Tokyo remains the best prepared Olympic city ever and at this moment, we have no reason to doubt that the Opening Ceremony will take place on 23rd of July. This is why our thanks and gratitude go in particular to the Government of Japan, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, the Organising Committee, the athletes, the IFs, the NOCs, all our TOP Partners and Rights-Holding Broadcasters for their steadfast commitment to the success of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. Thanks to this great determination and support of all our stakeholders, the question is not “whether”, the question is “how” these Olympic Games will take place.

Therefore, our efforts are focused on how to address COVID-19. In this context, we are together with our Japanese partners and friends developing comprehensive and science-based playbooks of COVID-19-countermeasures. The measures range from immigration requirements, to testing, social distancing, contact tracing, vaccinations and many more.

Therefore, the technical advice that we are getting from the scientific community, from the WHO, from health experts across the globe, is so essential. We must always be guided by science and facts.

We will establish specific countermeasures that apply to all the different groups participating in the Olympic Games: the athletes, the entourage, the officials, the volunteers, the sponsors, the media, the spectators, and of course, the Japanese people. We will also consider how each of these groups will interact with one another and what specific measures are needed to guide those interactions in order to keep everyone safe.

The task forces are doing a tremendous job in devising these playbooks in a very diligent and thorough way. This is why I would like to thank them already now for their excellent and fact-based approach, which of course needs to be work in progress, always taking the latest scientific developments and scientific expertise into account.

This fight against the virus, as we all know, is a tough fight. But we are fighting this fight, for and like, Olympic athletes. This means with full determination, with the will to win, with hard work every day, and with all the physical and mental strength we have.



We are grateful for the great support that we have received from so many. Most recently, the G7 Leaders expressed their strong support for the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 as a symbol of global unity in overcoming COVID-19. The IOC is very grateful for this strong signal of confidence and encouragement. This will inspire us to even reinforce our efforts, together with the Japanese government and the Organising Committee, to organise these Games in a safe and secure way for all.

The many world championships that have been held during these recent weeks and months are proof that sport can be organised safely and successfully, even under present restrictions. Here our thanks go to the International Federations who have organised over 270 major sporting events, meaning world championships or world cups, since September 2020. Cumulatively, these events have involved over 30,000 athletes. All of them had rigorous health and safety protocols in place, including extensive testing regimes, which far exceeded 200,000 tests.

Not a single of these events turned into a virus-spreader. So we have clear and obvious proof that very big international sport events with a large number of international participants can be organised while safeguarding the health of everyone.

This fact is even more significant because none of these events could benefit from vaccinations. In contrast, we are now in the very fortunate position that several vaccines are already widely in use. A considerable number of Olympic athletes is even already or about to be vaccinated in time for Tokyo. This situation will continue to improve greatly the closer we get to the Opening Ceremony.

The recent appointment of the seven-time Olympian and Olympic medallist Hashimoto Seiko as President of the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee gives us yet another reason for confidence. In fact, her first name is based on the Japanese word for Olympic flame. With her great Olympic and political experience, and carrying the Olympic flame in her name, she really is the perfect choice for this position. She will ensure that the focus in the final months of preparation remains on safety. We all agree that we have to focus on the essentials of the Olympic Games. This means ensuring that the competitions are held in a safe, secure and fair environment for all the athletes. In this context we will have to set one or the other priority and one or the other sacrifice will need to be made.



We very much welcome her strategic priorities including her initiatives with regard to promoting gender equality in Japan, where she is joining forces with Marukawa Tamayo, who succeeded her as Minister for the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. Together with the Governor of Tokyo, Koike Yuriko, they are forming an outstanding all-female leadership team. Together with them we are focused on the organisation of safe Olympic Games Tokyo 2020.

This year is an extraordinary Olympic Year in more than one way. While we are preparing for Tokyo this July, we are preparing in parallel with the same dedication for the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022.

We will hear more tomorrow from the Beijing 2022 Organising Committee when they present their progress report. We could already see at the recent One-Year-to-Go celebrations that their technical preparations are in an excellent state. All the venues are completed. In fact, the test events for the mountain cluster just took place a few days ago. Despite the many challenges of the coronavirus pandemic, we can say already now with great confidence that the Organising Committee is ready: ready to welcome the world's best winter sport athletes for this global celebration of sport.

Preparing for two editions of the Olympic Games will continue to be challenging for many different reasons, over the next months of this extraordinary Olympic Year.

At the same time, the world continues to evolve at an ever-increasing pace, creating even new challenges for us to turn into opportunities.

Nothing illustrates this better than the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic and its long-term consequences for society at large. The coronavirus crisis has already changed our world in profound ways. Nobody should even dream of going back to the way things were before the crisis.

As leaders of the Olympic Movement, we need to look beyond the here and now. We have to prepare ourselves for the post-coronavirus world.



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6

For this reason, we will discuss during this Session Olympic Agenda 2020 +5, our vision for this new world.

Our founder Pierre de Coubertin once said: “Humanity must find all the strength it can in the heritage of the past in order to build its future. Olympism is one of those strengths.”.

This is also true for this post-coronavirus world. We can even strengthen our values and our relevance if we are united and if we are adapting ourselves to this new world.

Today, our mission compels us to come together; to stand united; to carry our values into this post-coronavirus world and to contribute to shaping this new world.

This is why I invite you during this IOC Session to share this confidence in our strength and in our values in great unity. From this vantage point, we look ahead towards an even brighter future for our beloved Olympic Movement.

Dans ce vrai esprit olympique, je déclare la cent trente-septième Session du Comité International Olympique ouverte.