International Olympic Committee

FACTSHEET

Olympic Congresses

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The mission

The Olympic Congress brings together representatives of the Olympic Movement's constituents, i.e. the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the National Olympic Committees (NOCs), the International Sports Federations (IFs), the Organising Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs), athletes, representatives of coaches, judges and the media, as well as other participants and observers. According to the Olympic Charter (Bye-law to Rule 4), "*the Olympic Congress is convened by the President, upon decision of the Session, and organised by the IOC at a place and on a date determined by the Session. The President shall preside and determine the procedure.*". The role of the Congress is consultative.

Background to the IOC Congresses, themes covered and decisions taken

The very first Congress in 1894 in Paris re-established the Olympic Games. Since then, the Congresses have examined very precise themes. The three last editions have dealt with several subjects grouped under one general theme: "United by and for sport" in Baden-Baden in 1981, "Centennial Olympic Congress, Congress of Unity" in Paris in 1994, and "The Olympic Movement in society" in Copenhagen in 2009.

I Congress, Paris, June 1894

At the first Congress, two commissions were appointed to discuss the following subjects: the issue of amateurism, and above all the re-establishment of the Olympic Games. The first commission was chaired by M. Goudinet. The Chairman of the second commission was Demetrius Vikelas, who, a few days later, went on to become the first IOC President.
Besides the various regulations and definitions on the status of amateurism, the main decision of this Congress was to re-establish the Olympic Games as of 1896 – the first host being Athens. In addition, it was decided that Paris would host the 1900 edition of the Games. Also on this occasion, Baron Pierre de Coubertin announced the list of the first members of the *International Committee of the Olympic Games,* the first name of the IOC.

II Congress, Le Havre, July 1897

The work of the Le Havre Congress was based on two commissions. One focused its studies on education and health and the other on practising sport, mainly at school.

One of the noteworthy speakers of this Congress was Father Henri Didon, to whom we owe the Olympic motto: "Citius - Altius - Fortius".

The Congress's work and conclusions focused more on the development of sports practice and its usefulness among young people than on the Olympic Movement itself, but this was the choice of Baron de Coubertin, who defined the programme himself.

III Congress, Brussels, June 1905

This third Congress continued with the themes addressed previously in Le Havre. This time, three commissions were set up, but the volume of work was so large that sub-commissions had to be created.

The various themes dealt with were:

- education: physical exercise at primary and secondary school and university, and physical exercise for women;
- sporting interests: physical exercise in rural areas, in towns and on an international level;
- special issues on physical education, for example in young offenders' institutions.

As well as sports leaders, this Congress was marked by the large presence of academics, doctors,

journalists, scientists and writers from various backgrounds.

IV Congress, Paris, May 1906

In the mind of Baron de Coubertin, the arts and literature should have a place alongside the sporting competitions in the Games, just as it was in the Games of Antiquity. As the first three Congresses had neglected this issue, it was decided that the relationship between the arts, literature and sport would be the central subject of the 1906 edition.

The result of the various consultations was the addition of five artistic contests to the programme of the Olympic Games: music, literature, painting, sculpture and architecture. The prizes awarded for these contests were equal to those awarded to the athletes. The artistic contests were organised from 1912 to 1948.

V Congress, Lausanne, May 1913

Devoted to psychology and sports physiology (in a slightly different sense from what we understand by these terms today), this Congress brought together many scientists and various personalities, such as former US President Theodore Roosevelt.

Three main discussion areas kept the participants occupied:

- the origins of sports activity: natural ability, sporting instinct, imitation, role of the will;
- continuity and modalities: the possibility of creating the need to do sport, physiological particularities of each exercise category: intellectual and moral qualities (solitude, camaraderie, independence, cooperation);
- results: conditions for sporting performance, fundamental training regulations, sports activity as the seed of a practical philosophy.

The number and diversity of the interventions did not allow the Congress to draw conclusions or adopt final resolutions. This fifth edition, however, was probably the first high level scientific meeting on sport in history.

VI Congress, Paris, June 1914

To celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the first Congress in 1894, this sixth edition again took place in the Sorbonne amphitheatre in Paris.

Its central theme was different from previous congresses, however, with debates centred around the regulations of the Olympic Games, the sports programme, and entry, admission and eligibility conditions.

Unlike previous editions, the NOCs and IFs actively took part in this Congress.

VII Congress, Lausanne, June 1921

This Congress focused exclusively on technical issues linked to sports at the Olympic Games and general rules for organising the event.

The themes addressed reflected the preoccupations of the IFs, which were becoming increasingly important and structured partners of the IOC.

This meeting also saw a discussion on holding Olympic Winter Games, although this was not yet the official name at the time. The organisation of winter competitions was left to the choice of the host country of the summer Games, which allowed France to organise an international winter sports week in Chamonix in 1924. This event would become the first Olympic Winter Games in history.

VIII Congress, Prague, May-June 1925

Divided into two sub-Congresses – one educational, the other technical – this 1925 meeting marked the end of Pierre de Coubertin's activities as IOC President.

This separation into two very distinct parts was also the sign of a marked trend of the time: on one side, sports institutions' lack of interest in educational issues and the benefits of sport; on the other, a growing need for international competitions to have their own rules and statutes. Coubertin himself admitted that the Olympic Movement was detaching itself more and more from issues of education and culture through sport and focusing on technical problems. To remedy this problem and given the poor results produced by the Prague Congress, the former IOC President decided to set up the *International Sports Education Office*.

The themes chosen by the technical commission reflected the issues with which, at the time, the authorities responsible for organising the Games were confronted:

- Olympic oath;

- the reduction of the Games programme;
- national ranking at the Games;
- rights and responsibilities of the various juries;
- judges' travel costs;
- definitions and extent of the NOCs' powers;
- organisation of the Games;
- modification of the regulations during the Games;
- the 1928 Olympic Games;
- the Winter Games;
- regional qualifying competitions for the Olympic football tournament;
- organisational issues concerning transport and accommodation.

IX Congress, Berlin, May 1930

One of the main decisions taken at this Congress was the creation of a permanent Board of Olympic IFs delegates responsible for debating, with the IOC Executive Board (EB), general issues linked to Games participation and the rules of the sports competitions.

The second important theme of this Congress was once again the definition and status of amateur athletes at the Games. The main decision taken by the participants was the ban on compensating athletes for the loss of salary suffered owing to their participation in the Olympic Games.

The last point on the agenda of this 1930 meeting – the construction of sports infrastructure – was only partially addressed and did not lead to any real decisions. Nonetheless, from the discussions of this working group, there appeared a view on sports equipment that is still relevant today, as they looked at the importance of sports equipment in urban areas, and the high cost and use of infrastructure for elite sport.

X Congress, Varna, September-October 1973

Forty-three years after Berlin, the Congress moved to Varna (Bulgaria), and was led by Lord Killanin, elected IOC President the previous year. It was called the Congress of Revival.

There was no Congress organised between Berlin and Varna, mainly due to the logistical difficulties in organising such a meeting and also because discussions between the IOC and other entities of the Olympic Movement were held via other communication channels.

The agenda of this Congress was prepared in close collaboration with the NOCs and IFs, which had strongly hoped for the re-establishment of the Olympic Congresses.

The three themes chosen for these working days did not correspond totally to the official title of the Congress: "*Sport for a World of Peace*".
The participants worked on:

- redefining the Olympic Movement and its future;
- relations between the IOC, IFs and NOCs;
- the outline of future Olympic Games.

One of the merits of this Varna meeting was the tightening and improvement of relations between the three main constituents of the Olympic Movement (the IOC, NOCs and IFs).

But the discussions also highlighted the problems which the IOC had to face: the gigantism of the Games in terms of organisation; the ever more frequent recourse to doping products; and the place of women in the international sports movement and their representation in sports competitions.

The issue of amateurism, which once again came into the spotlight, revealed the cultural differences existing between countries as regards the preparation and training of high-level athletes, as well as the ever greater intervention of governments in sports administration.

XI Congress, Baden-Baden, September 1981

This Congress, organised one year after the Moscow Games, was President Juan Antonio Samaranch's first.

Doping, mercantilism, too much political intrusion, professionalism - sport, and the Olympic Games in particular, had been confronted with these problems on a regular basis since the previous assembly in Varna. The 469 congress participants present thus had the opportunity to exchange their points of view and propose solutions to make the Olympic Movement less susceptible to these various intrusions.

The final declaration adopted at the end of the Congress was broken down into three parts, which can be summarised as follows:

- the future of the Olympic Games: the participants asked to maintain and strengthen the cooperation between the member-entities of the Olympic Movement. They also requested that efforts be deployed so that the Games could take place everywhere in the world to reflect the moderns trends of sport. The congress participants reaffirmed their position against the participation of professionals, while committing to respect the demands of each Olympic sport;
- international cooperation: the proposals focused essentially on strengthening the fight against doping and giving aid to developing countries through Olympic Solidarity. Within the framework of the Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden, the President of the IOC, Juan Antonio Samaranch, and the President of ANOC, Mario Vázquez Raña, set up the Olympic Solidarity Commission with an up-to-date strategy to respond to the interests and needs of the NOCs. Thus, the period that can be identified as the consolidation and development stage of Olympic Solidarity was initiated;
- the future of the Olympic Movement: the final declaration reinforced the position of the IOC as the guide of the worldwide sports movement, with the assistance of the IFs and NOCs. It was also requested that sports administrations reserve more places for women and that governments reinforce and develop sports organisations' independence and autonomy;
- For the first time at a Congress, an observer role was given to media representatives, effectively giving them a place within the Olympic family.

One of the concrete steps after the Congress was the creation of the Athletes' Commission with athletes present in Baden-Baden as founding members including the current IOC President, Thomas Bach.

XII Congress, Paris, August- September 1994

This Congress of Unity, also called the Centennial Congress, in memory of the first one held in Paris in 1894, brought together 1,687 people, and 487 congress participants took the floor. The work focused on the following four main themes:

- the contribution of the Olympic Movement to modern society;
- the contemporary athlete;
- sport in a social context;
- sport and the mass media.

Given the scale of the subjects tackled and the discussions and exchanges which took place on this occasion, President Samaranch created a study commission responsible for exploiting as much as possible the results achieved by the participants.

The report adopted contained 18 proposals for amendments to the Olympic Charter, 16 resolution proposals and one draft decision.
Among these proposals were several pioneering ideas concerning in particular the environment, sustainable development, and the promotion of peace. Other recommendations included improving media coverage of the Games in developing countries, and reinforcing the place of athletes and coaches within the Olympic Movement. There were also proposals to set up activity programmes to promote Sport for All, and to encourage women to practise sport.

These recommendations have since been integrated by the IOC and its partners into their policies to develop Olympism and promote its fundamental values.

XIII Congress, Copenhagen, October 2009

At the 118th IOC Session in Turin, the city of Copenhagen (Denmark) was awarded the organisation of the XIII Congress and the 121st IOC Session.

The XIII Olympic Congress, entitled "The Olympic Movement in society", was held from 3 to 5 October 2009 and brought together more than 1,240 participants.

The Congress provided a rare opportunity for the entire Olympic family (i.e. IOC members, representatives of NOCs, IFs, OCOGs, athletes, coaches, media, sponsors and other stakeholders such as NGOs and academics) to meet and discuss issues of importance to the entire Movement. Over the course of the three-day Congress, participants heard from many respected speakers and had interesting discussions on the following themes:
1. the Athletes

2. the Olympic Games
3. the Structure of the Olympic Movement
4. Olympism and Youth and
5. the Digital Revolution.

A half day was devoted to the discussions of each of the five themes at the Congress. The plenary sessions were followed by three simultaneous breakout sessions on the respective subthemes already defined. All the sessions were live-cast over the internet to allow the general public to hear the discussions as they happened.

The breakout sessions on each of the subthemes began with presentations from a panel of speakers. The moderators of each panel were then responsible for the ensuing discussion period, which gave participants the opportunity to voice their opinions on the issues. The main points from each breakout session were carefully recorded by rapporteurs who informed the Editorial Committee of the discussions at the end of each day. The final document produced at the end of the Congress reflected the main ideas to come out of the proceedings in Copenhagen, as well as information collected through the Virtual Olympic Congress. The Virtual Olympic Congress allowed the Olympic family and the public to submit written contributions on the five themes during the preparatory phase.
The XIII Olympic Congress was a great success and has left the Olympic Movement with a blueprint for the future. The process to translate words into action and implement the 66 recommendations is in full swing.

Download the recommendations here.

The virtual Olympic Congress

In July 2007, former IOC President Jacques Rogge made an official "Call for Contributions" for the XIII Olympic Congress in Copenhagen to all members of the Olympic family at the IOC Session in Guatemala City. He also announced that, for the first time in the history of Olympic Congresses, the general public would be invited to express their opinions on the discussion themes.
In order to facilitate the preparations for the XIII Olympic Congress, the IOC launched the Virtual Olympic Congress – a website dedicated to online submissions on the themes and sub-themes of the Congress from members of the Olympic family, the public and the IOC administration.

In all there were 453 Olympic family contributions and 1,319 contributions from the general public. The IOC administration submitted 32 contributions to the Virtual Olympic Congress, which took several forms such as commission reports, outputs from forums and/or meetings – such as The Autonomy of Sport (Lausanne, February 2008) and the 6th World Forum on Sport, Education and Culture (Busan, September 2008) – as well as expert reports.

All the ideas and proposals put forward by Olympic family contributors were compiled in a single document, which formed the basis of the Final Document of the Congress, and assisted the speakers, moderators and rapporteurs with their preparations.

Publications

- View the publication "XIII Olympic Congress – Contributions"
- View the publication "XIII Olympic Congress – Proceedings"
- View the publication "XIII Olympic Congress – Follow-up"

More information on the XIII Olympic Congress is available at this link.

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