



International
Olympic
Committee

The President

Welcome speech of the 138th IOC Session

Tokyo, 20 July 2021

Welcome to the 138th IOC Session. Yes, we finally made it here to Tokyo. Being reunited with all of you in person after being forced to stay apart such a long time because of the global pandemic is really a very special feeling.

We can only be together today because of the heroic efforts of all the doctors, nurses, healthcare workers and the many volunteers around the world. Let us pay tribute to all these true champions who are supporting those in need, caring for society with true solidarity and fighting so hard against the pandemic. It is thanks to them that we can be together again.

At the same time, we also remember all those people here in Japan and around the world who have been affected and continue to be affected by this pandemic. This is why, I would like to ask you to stand for a minute of silence, as we honour the memory of all those we have lost.

[minute of silence]

Thank you.

Dear Japanese partners and friends,

What a journey this has been. When Japan set out 10 years ago to bring the Olympic spirit back to Tokyo after the pathbreaking Olympic Games Tokyo 1964, none of us could have ever imagined the unprecedented challenges we would face.

The Great East Japan Earthquake. The coronavirus pandemic. The first-ever postponement of the Olympic Games.

We could only overcome all these challenges for the Olympic Games because throughout the past eight years we were enjoying a trustful partnership. We could always rely on you. This made us admire even more the Japanese virtues of dedication and perseverance.

For this unique partnership and friendship, forged by this unprecedented situation, I would like to express our most sincere thanks and gratitude to so many. In particular, we would like to thank the Government of Japan under the leadership of Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide and previously Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. Our thanks and appreciation go to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government under the leadership of Governor Koike Yuriko. Our heartfelt gratitude also goes to the Organising Committee under the leadership of the great Olympian, President Hashimoto Seiko, and her predecessor Mori Yoshiro. All of you, and many more, have demonstrated such determination and dedication in these challenging times.

The founder of the IOC, Pierre de Coubertin, once said: “The Olympic Games are a pilgrimage to the past and an act of faith in the future.”

These timeless words take on a special meaning today, on the eve of these Olympic Games. Because with the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 we are committing such an act of faith in the future.

Just like the Olympic Games Tokyo 1964 marked a new era for a peaceful and dynamic Japan, the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 will give humanity faith in the future.

The best athletes of the world are looking forward with anticipation to make their Olympic dream finally come true.

These athletes share the experience of perseverance with the people of Japan.

Now the stage is set for the athletes to shine and inspire the world. Their amazing achievements, their effort, excellence, emotions, joy and tears – this creates the magic of the Olympic Games.

This is also the time for Japan to shine. Despite the very difficult decisions that you, the Japanese authorities, we the IOC, and all of us had to take, these Olympic Games will send a powerful message from Japan to the world. The message of peace. The message of solidarity. The message of resilience.

Billions of people around the globe will follow and appreciate these Olympic Games. They will admire the Japanese people for what they have achieved.

How much the entire international community is longing for the unifying power of sport is demonstrated by the support expressed by the G7 and G20 countries as well as by the United Nations and its agencies. Therefore, we are delighted that we will be able to welcome tomorrow morning to this IOC Session, the Director General of the World Health Organisation, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who will be addressing us with a keynote speech.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, summarises this great appreciation and support in his address to us.

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