



International
Olympic
Committee

The President

**Inauguration of the new premises of the International Olympic Academy
Olympia, 17 October 2021**

When I visited the International Olympic Academy for the very first time, I was a member of the IOC Athletes' Commission. Even though this was admittedly a little more than just a few years ago, it still seems to me like only yesterday that I was sitting on this lawn with so many other young people from across the globe.

There was something magical, almost spiritual about being here, listening to the scholars of the Academy, learning about our ancient heritage and the timeless values that have been handed down over generations.

Anyone who has come to ancient Olympia and the Academy intuitively feels that this is a very special place – a sacred place.

For the Olympians among us, it carries an even greater significance. This is our spiritual home.

Right here, in the shadow of Mount Kronos, surrounded by the reminders of the magnificent ancient past, we can feel the Olympic spirit. Right here, this is the cradle of the Olympic Games, the birthplace of this great gift of Greek civilisation to humankind.

It is always a personal and emotional highlight for me to deliver the opening speech to the session of the International Olympic Academy. It is held in Athens, on the Hill of Pnyx, where already the ancient Athenians came together to discuss the important political issues of the day, on the basis of democratic principles. I will always treasure this unique experience because it brings together the Olympic Games with the other precious gift of the Greek people to the world: democracy. It is also a wonderful occasion to connect with all the young people that study at the Academy.

For all these reasons, today's ceremony is very moving for me and I guess for many of you as well.

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

These words take on a special significance today with regards to the International Olympic Academy.

Simply put, the Academy is the bridge that connects us to our past and that carries the Olympic spirit into the future. As the educational centre of the Olympic Movement, the Academy lays the intellectual foundation for preserving our heritage and for the Olympic spirit to inspire the next generation of leaders in sport and society. In this way, the Academy supports the IOC to better pursue our overarching mission to put sport at the service of humanity.

This is why when the proposal to renovate the Academy was first brought up, it took me not even one second to agree. With this renovation, we are reinvigorating the mission of the Academy, giving a boost to Olympic education and setting the course for a bright future of our Olympic Movement.

As we inaugurate the new facilities today, I would like to express my thanks to everyone at the Academy for their excellent cooperation over the years. In particular, my thanks go to President Isidoros Kouvelos, and the members of the Ephoria. Under their great leadership, the Academy has established itself as a leading academic institution for Olympic education.

In this respect, I would also like to acknowledge the invaluable work by the Hellenic Olympic Committee under the great leadership of its President, my dear IOC colleague and friend, Spyros Capralos, in supporting the Academy’s noble mission and in this way safeguarding our great heritage.

If we listen closely, I am sure we can even hear the heart of our dear founder Pierre de Coubertin beating a little faster in excitement of seeing the Academy today. In fact, already during his time, he had envisioned a centre dedicated to Olympic studies. This was especially important for him because he always saw the Olympic Games as much more than just a sporting event. He was first and foremost an educator, so from the very beginning, sport and education were linked to the Olympic Games. Coubertin wanted to make the world a better place through sport. This remains the overarching mission of the IOC and the Olympic Movement to this very day. The Academy, as a guardian institution of our great heritage, therefore plays a central role to carry these values to the future.

Seeing these state-of-the-art facilities in our spiritual home of ancient Olympia in their new splendour fills all of us with immense pride. It also fills everyone in the Olympic community with great anticipation for the future. With this modernisation, the Academy has the best conditions at its disposal to carry out our shared mission.

Students and scholars were always inspired by this unique location. Now following the renovation of the Academy, they can pursue their studies in a state-of-the-art functional environment as well.

This is why I can only encourage you to use this momentum. Because in these difficult times that we live in, we need the values of sport, and we need this Olympic spirit more than ever.

In a world drifting apart, the Olympic Games are the only event that brings the entire world together in peaceful competition.

As the global coronavirus pandemic has made abundantly clear, we can only address the many challenges in the world in solidarity. This is the lesson that we have learned from the pandemic: we need more solidarity. We need more solidarity within societies, and more solidarity among societies.

Because there is no peace without solidarity.

This is why all of us in the Olympic community have to make all efforts to strengthen solidarity through sport.

Today we are here to celebrate our great Greek heritage and the revitalisation of the International Olympic Academy. In doing so, we are sending another important message from Olympia to the world: Sport and the Olympic Movement everywhere, we are ready to contribute to rebuild a more human-centred and a more inclusive post-corona society.

The stage is set for a bright future. Today, the Academy is in the best position to seize the opportunities that lie ahead. Building on the success of Olympic Agenda 2020 and guided by Olympic Agenda 2020+5, the IOC and the Academy have a solid foundation to chart the course for the future of our beloved Olympic Movement.

Yes, we live in uncertain times. But let us take courage once more from our founder Pierre de Coubertin who said: “Charge boldly through the clouds and do not be afraid. The future belongs to you.”

So in this true Olympic spirit, let us shape our future together.