



International
Olympic
Committee

The President

40th Anniversary of the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations

Lausanne, 31 May 2023

Dear ASOIF President, my dear friend Francesco Ricci Bitti,

Dear Olympic friends,

Please allow me to congratulate the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations on your 40th anniversary. It is a good opportunity to look back for a moment and then at the same time to look forward, based on what has been achieved by ASOIF over the past 40 years and what together – you, the International Federations and IOC – what we can achieve together in the future.

Because Olympic sport has undergone extreme changes over the past four decades. Throughout this time, the role of the International Federations as a pillar of our Olympic Movement, has only grown in relevance. The growth of ASOIF reflects this evolution towards ever-more professionalisation of sports and sport events organisation.

Since your establishment in 1983 – with 21 member federations at that time – ASOIF has played a vital role in promoting the IFs by bringing together the shared interests of each federation. In this way, ASOIF has grown to become an invaluable partner of the IOC and of every stakeholder in the Olympic Movement. With 31 ASOIF member federations today, your own development reflects the growing role of the IFs.

Perhaps it is thanks to your founding President, the legendary Primo Nebiolo, that I always think of ASOIF of having a very distinctive Italian flair. Many of us will have fond memories of his engaging personality and sometimes disarming charm. But behind his self-deprecating humour, he had a very clear vision for ASOIF. He was always direct and unwavering in defending what he considered to be the common interest of all IFs. At the same time he was also very constructive to work towards solutions.

This constructive spirit was carried forward by your second President, my dear colleague and friend Denis Oswald. If Nebiolo brought Italian flair to ASOIF, Denis brought the best of the quintessentially Swiss qualities of reliability and stability to your organisation. Under Denis' leadership, ASOIF established itself as the reliable partner and expert voice for the IOC on all IF-related matters.

Your current President, Francesco Ricci Bitti is building on this strong foundation that his predecessors have put in place. And of course, he builds on the distinct Italian tradition at ASOIF. Under Francesco's truly great leadership, ASOIF continues to rise to new heights, guiding IFs on a path of innovation, social relevance, good governance and compliance. I will leave it other speakers to take a more detailed look at the historical trajectory of ASOIF, but what I can safely say now is that during your presidency, dear Francesco, our organisations – ASOIF and the IOC – are enjoying the closest cooperation ever in our history.

Today, ASOIF is bringing invaluable know-how and expertise to the Olympic Movement. This is especially true when it comes to the role of IFs as an indispensable partner of the IOC in delivering the Olympic Games. In today's complex environment, the IFs are essential to finding innovative solutions to continuously modernise sport and in this way contributing to the modernisation and to the success of the Olympic Games. This importance of the IFs in Olympic Games planning is explicitly recognised and highlighted in Olympic Agenda 2020 and Olympic Agenda 2020+5. This is why Summer Olympic IFs are represented on all Olympic Games Coordination Commissions to ensure that sport and athlete planning remain at the forefront of all our collective work of successful Games planning.

Perhaps nothing illustrates this better than the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. These were historic Olympic Games held against the backdrop of a global pandemic. It took an unprecedented effort to make them happen in a safe and secure manner for all

participants. We could only make the first-ever postponed Olympic Games a reality because of the unified support of everyone in our Olympic community.

Today I can admit that when we took the historic decision to postpone the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, nobody had an idea how complex this would be. There was no blueprint. Nobody had ever done this before.

But imagine if we would not have done it. Imagine what this would have meant for the Olympic Movement and for each and every one of your federations. We would have disappeared from the attention of the world for eight years. There would not have been billions of viewers watching your sport and watching these postponed Olympic Games. There would have been no stage for your athletes on a truly global level. There would have been no Olympic sport being watched seen and followed in many parts of the world. So it was extremely important that we could organise these Games – and that we could organise these Games together. Because during this very challenging period, in navigating these uncharted waters, we could rely on the collective knowledge, expertise, and guidance of ASOIF and all your member federations.

Therefore, ASOIF and all your member federations therefore played an essential part in writing history in Tokyo. This is something that ASOIF can be extremely proud of.

This is why my heartfelt thanks and gratitude go to everyone at ASOIF and to President Francesco Ricci Bitti in particular. Thank you for your contribution to writing history at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020.

Over 40 years, ASOIF has demonstrated that by coming together, we are always stronger than the sum of our parts. The collective strength of IFs makes all of us in the Olympic Movement stronger as well.

On this milestone anniversary, I say: Thank you, ASOIF. Thank you for the important work you are doing every day to grow and develop your respective sports. Thank for being the reliable of all the Summer IFs.

Thank you for rigorously defending the autonomy of sport. Thank you for always strengthening the unity of the Olympic Movement.

In this time when our autonomy is being undermined by some governments; in this time when some forces want to divide our global sports movement; in these challenging times, this unity is fundamental for the future of global sports.

The most recent example of this are your decisions with regard to the participation of individual neutral athletes with a Russian or Belarusian passport. For the vast majority of you, they are based on the initiative of the Olympic Summit, asking the IOC to find a pathway for athletes of these countries to return to international competition, while maintaining the sanctions against their states and governments.

In this respect, I would in particular like to thank the ASOIF Council for its very clear declaration, emphasising the necessity to separate sport and politics.

Everybody knows that such an extremely complex political problem cannot have an easy solution. Only populists pretend to have easy solutions for the most complex problems in the world. This complex situation also presents one or the other challenge for you, when it comes to applying the recommendations and strict conditions.

But many of you have proven that it can be done. Many IFs have organised international sport events and even world championships, applying the recommendations and very successfully delivering these competitions. And you are doing so against the backdrop of the many naysayers who want to make people believe that it would never work.

From the very first moment we are – and we will be – in this together. Because at the end, it is about the unity of our Olympic Movement. In the end, it is about the true universality of your competitions and in particular, it is about the universality of your world championship – in the truest sense of the word.

The overwhelming majority of the international community understands this challenging situation for sport and supports our middle-ground approach. This has been expressed by many statements from the overwhelming majority of the NOCs of the world, but also by many statements of political leaders on the level of the United Nations, intergovernmental organisations and heads of state and government.

The most recent example is the G7 Summit in Hiroshima, Japan, where the Leaders of France, Italy, the United States, Canada, Germany, Great Britain and Japan said: “While fully respecting the autonomy of sporting organisations, we are focused on fair sporting competition as well as on ensuring that Russian and Belarusian athletes are in no way appearing as representatives of their states.” This is exactly our position.

This is our position defending the autonomy of sport. This is our position to establish these strict recommendation to ensure the neutrality of athletes with a Russian or Belarusian passport in international competitions. This declaration gives us another strong foundation – so let us stand together on this strong foundation, united in our mission to truly unify the entire world in peaceful competitions.

In this spirit of unity, I extend the hand of the IOC to ASOIF and each and every one of you. Let us join hands in partnership, looking forward to excellent Olympic Games Paris 2024 as a true festival of sport and humanity. In this way, we are living our new Olympic motto: Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together.

Congratulations once more. A wonderful 40th anniversary. All the best for our shared future – together.