



International
Olympic
Committee

The President

Olympic Order for Dr. Tedros Gebreyesus

Olympic House, 20 June 2023

Dear Olympic friends,

Dear Dr. Tedros,

During the global COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization and yourself were in the spotlight like never before. As the virus raged, the world turned to you – it turned to you for guidance, reassurance and hope that this pandemic can and will be brought under control.

The pandemic affected communities and countries all around the globe – it affected all of us. The world of sport was greatly affected as well, as normal life as we knew it ground to a standstill.

The pandemic made it crystal clear just how important sport is for our physical and mental health. Sport can save lives.

This is why we in sport tried to make our contribution to fight the pandemic.

This is why our “StayStrong, StayActive, StayHealthy” campaign resonated so strongly.

This is why so many athletes were among those leading the fight against the virus, helping and comforting people in need, working in hospitals and healthcare facilities. At a time when people all over the world had to stay at home to contain the spread of the virus, athletes encouraged us to stay active and to stay healthy. In doing so, they showed us that even in these unprecedented times, sport gives hope.

It was during these times, that both our organisations – the WHO and the IOC – realised that we needed to find new ways of cooperating. This led us to sign a cooperation agreement in May 2020, in the very early stages of the pandemic. With this agreement, we opened a new dimension to bringing sport and health together as a winning team.

Building on this new momentum, we developed a number of joint initiatives and programmes, deepening our already longstanding partnership and formalising our cooperation at the operational level.

One such initiative which quickly bore fruit was the #HealthyTogether campaign which we launched together with the WHO and the United Nations, almost exactly three years ago, on Olympic Day, the 23rd of June 2020. On this same Olympic Day more than half a billion people around the globe were introduced to our campaign through the world's biggest digital Olympic workout, demonstrating in a powerful way how important sport is for our physical and mental health.

Beyond such joint efforts to fight the pandemic, we are also cooperating to build healthy and active communities through sport. This is urgently needed because according to WHO studies, worldwide, 1 in 4 adults and 3 in 4 adolescents do not engage in enough physical activity. Here sport can have an impact because sport is the low-cost, high-impact tool *par excellence* for health, promoting physical activity and fighting non-communicable diseases.

This is why we are working to strengthen the cooperation between WHO staff in regional and country offices with National Olympic Committees, sport federations and local authorities to use sport more effectively to improve health in communities at the grassroots level. By bringing together our Olympism365 strategy and the WHO Global Action Plan for Physical Activity, we are joining hands to get people to move, to do sport and to lead active lives.

For this year's Olympic Day, we are focusing again on promoting physical activity, when we will launch our "Let's Move" campaign. Supported by our friends at the WHO, we invite the world to join us and celebrate the joy of moving by building physical activity into our daily lives.

For all these initiatives, we rely on the expertise, input and engagement of the WHO. In this respect, you, dear Tedros, have set the pace – because from the very day we signed our cooperation agreement, you have led by example, driving our cooperation forward with so much energy, leadership and commitment.

We took our cooperation to a whole new level when it came to organising the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 during a global pandemic in 2021 – to make them safe and secure for everyone. Already in the late summer of 2020, we started to think about vaccinations as an essential component to manage the COVID-19 risks at these Olympic Games.

Also in this respect, we saw very quickly that by joining hands, our organisations could be greater than sum of our parts. This was especially true when it came to the important issue of vaccine equity. Appealing to the conscience of world leaders to make vaccinations available for everyone, and encouraging as many people as possible to get vaccinated – this is what you, dear Tedros, were championing tirelessly throughout the pandemic. Your relentless advocacy in turn inspired many of us – leading to sport organisations and in particular many athletes to join the pro-vaccination campaigns in countries around the world, appealing to people everywhere to get their shots and increase the vaccination rate worldwide.

On this basis, we could then turn to the organisation of these first-ever postponed Olympic Games in history. Today I can admit, that when we began with this unprecedented challenge, nobody knew how complex this would be. There was no blueprint. Nobody had ever done this before.

In this situation, dear Tedros, your personal support and guidance was crucial.

Your advice was essential for us to develop comprehensive countermeasures. Your expertise and wise counsel resulted in the so-called playbooks detailing the specific countermeasures.

Here I would like to again express my heartfelt thanks to you, because from the outset you supported these playbooks and you made your support known publicly to instil confidence which we so dearly needed: in the athletes, the Japanese Organising Committee, the National Olympic Committees and in the public at large.

I still remember the many conversations we had during that time. In one of them you promised me, without hesitating for a moment, that you would not only publicly support the playbooks and the countermeasures, but that as a demonstration of your confidence and trust, you accepted my invitation to attend these Olympic Games in person.

Your promise came months before the Opening Ceremony, when nobody could foresee how the situation would finally evolve. I think today I can reveal that your strong support was met with great scepticism and even with internal resistance at the WHO. But you never wavered. You were steadfast in your support. From that moment, I knew that the Olympic Movement could trust you. I knew that in you, we did not only have a great partner and supporter of the Olympic Games. I knew that in you, I have found a true brother.

You stood with us all the way. You kept your promise and came to Tokyo, where you addressed the IOC Session and a worldwide audience.

This is why it is fair to say that without your steadfast personal support, these Olympic Games could not have happened in this safe way.

As you so eloquently put it at the IOC Session in Tokyo: “The Olympic Games bring the nations of the world together in competition, as athletes strive to fulfil the Olympic motto of Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together. But ultimately, they are a celebration of something even more important; of something that our world needs now, more than ever: A celebration of hope.”

My dear brother,

May this celebration of hope, may this Olympic spirit continue to inspire you.

And to keep this inspiration burning brightly, I would already now like to extend an invitation to you, to be a guest of honour of the IOC at the Olympic Games Paris 2024. So that together we can look forward to excellent Olympic Games as a true festival of sport, health and humankind.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Gebreyesus,

In recognition of your outstanding merit in the cause of world sport, and your faithfulness to the Olympic ideal, as illustrated by Pierre de Coubertin, renovator of the Olympic Games, I award you the Olympic Order.