



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

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President

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Thank you for the opportunity to address you here today on this important topic of human rights in sport. The Director General of the International Labour Organisation, Guy Ryder, already referred to our two predecessors, the founder of the IOC, Pierre de Coubertin, and Albert Thomas, the first ILO Director, who first established contact between our two organisations back in 1922.

Historically speaking, our cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights is more recent, but it is nevertheless one of deep importance to both of us. In a personal meeting, the High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein and I agreed to strengthen our cooperation by having a regular exchange and finding a common approach wherever appropriate. This is why I would like to thank the High Commissioner very much for his initiative and his commitment to respect human rights in the Olympic Movement.

Indeed, promoting human rights in and through sport is more than a priority for the IOC. After all, the overarching mission of the IOC is to make the world a better place through sport. Human rights are in fact firmly anchored in the Olympic Charter. Therefore, our mission to put sport at the service of humanity, goes hand-in-hand with human rights. In Olympic sport, all people are equal, regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, social status, cultural background, or belief. This principle of non-discrimination allows sport to promote peace and understanding among all people because the same rule applies to everybody.

The Olympic Games are the culmination of this vision. This is why I want to explain our approach to human rights through the lens of the Olympic Games.

The power of the Olympic Games is their universality and global appeal. The Olympic Games show us what our world could look like, if we were guided by the Olympic values of peace, solidarity and respect. In the Olympic Village, where the athletes live during the competitions, we have athletes from all 206 National Olympic Committees living together peacefully under one roof. They share their meals, they share their experience and their



emotions. They are competitors in sport, but they share their respect for each other in victory and defeat. This Olympic spirit is the defining experience for all Olympic athletes. Whenever I meet other Olympic athletes, no matter where they are from or when they participated in the Olympic Games, this shared experience of the Olympic Village unites us all and becomes immediately the topic of conversation. This is why even now as IOC President, I try to stay in the Olympic Village as often as I can.

The only way that the IOC can make this vision a reality is through a strict commitment to political neutrality. Only this principle of political neutrality ensures that the Olympic Games can stand above and beyond political differences.

Political neutrality goes hand-in-hand with the autonomy of sport. You can only be neutral if you are autonomous. With this autonomy, we can ensure the worldwide equal application of the rules and laws of sport. Without these global rules and laws of sport, there would be no fair international competition. But we also know that with autonomy comes responsibility. Just like the Olympic Movement expects politics to respect the autonomy of sport, politics can expect us to respect the standards of good governance. Autonomy and good governance are therefore two sides of the same coin.

All of this does not mean, however, that we are apolitical. We actively seek out partnerships with governments and international organisations, because we know that we can only make progress by working together. We are always open for cooperation and partnership with governments, within a framework of mutual respect, with regards to our respective roles and responsibilities.

Whereas governments have their defined areas of responsibility in society, one of the key responsibilities of the IOC is to ensure the application of the Olympic Charter at the Olympic Games. This applies equally to all athletes and to all participants of the Olympic Games. It guarantees basic equal rights for everyone during the Olympic Games, such as non-discrimination or freedom of the press to report from the Olympic Games.

One of the concrete ways we are ensuring this, is by including such basic rights in our host city contract. In this way, the cities commit themselves already as candidates for hosting the Olympic Games. They commit themselves to respect the Olympic Charter and the host city



contract for all participants of the Games and all Games-related matters. We have recently made changes to the host city contract, which now includes a specific section designed to strengthen and protect human rights. The obligations now include that human rights are respected in line with international agreements and standards, including the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

In doing so, we have raised the bar even higher with regards to protecting human rights at the Olympic Games. We are very pleased that in making these changes, we worked in close consultation with a number of different stakeholders, in particular the Sport and Rights Alliance.

In this context, we welcome the “Mega-Sporting Events Platform for Human Rights”. When we speak about sport and human rights, we should not forget that sport is a human right. We should also protect this human right for sport and physical activity for everyone. We are happy to participate in the MSE Platform because it is a reflection of our belief in the role and relevance of sport in our world today. It is also a reflection of our firm belief in the power of dialogue and collective action. The MSE Platform is a forum to exchange views with our stakeholders, to define precisely those areas of Games-related matters where cooperation is important. We are confident that with such a platform, we can also learn a lot from our partners in politics. They can inform us how they address human rights, labour and transparency issues when it comes to the organisation of their mega-events, like the World Expo or other political conferences and political fora. With such a framework for open exchange and dialogue, we all make progress.

Let me thank all the partners of the MSE Platform for taking such a positive and open approach. We welcome the intention of the Steering Committee, of which the IOC is a member, to establish an independent centre for Sport and Human Rights. We look forward to supporting this process and are ready to do our part.

The concept of progress through engagement is an important one for us, and if I may add, not only in the area of human rights. After all, this is what the Olympic Games represent. The Olympic Games always build bridges. They never erect walls. The Olympic Games help to put the global spotlight on a host country. This global attention, starting already in the candidature phase, opens the path for progress. It is only with this engagement that you can



open the door for change. This is why I firmly believe that engagement is always better than isolation.

Granting the right to host the Olympic Games does not mean that the IOC agrees with everything that happens in a country. But a dialogue on fundamental principles and values can only happen if you engage with your partner.

In this regard, the IOC will always do its utmost to uphold and defend the values that the Olympic Games are based on. Even before the specific provisions were added to the host city contract, the IOC already demanded from host countries the necessary assurances that human rights will be respected during the Games.

For example, we were facing such a situation with regard to legislation in Russia which prohibits the public promotion of homosexual orientation. The IOC asked for and received assurances that this law would not apply for any of the participants of the Olympic Winter Games Sochi 2014. This assurance was respected. Another example was the situation of unpaid migrant workers on the Olympic sites. After the IOC raised this issue, and in consultation with ILO already at the time, more than 500 companies were investigated and unpaid wages in the amount of more than 8 million US dollars were paid to over 6,000 workers.

One other example comes from the Olympic Games Rio 2016, where one of our legacies is our joint initiative with UN Women called "One Win Leads to Another". With this initiative, we are supporting 2,500 young girls across the State of Rio de Janeiro. The programme empowers girls to fight against violence against women by building their leadership skills through quality sport training, creating safe spaces and providing them tools and knowledge to break social barriers. This too, is an illustration of the power of sport to bring about positive change in communities. I am very happy that just a few weeks ago, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UN Women to cooperate for another five years on a very specific programme on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

This goes to show that the IOC must be politically neutral, but cannot be apolitical. At the same time, we know that the IOC is not a world government. Our responsibilities are with regards to the organisation of the Olympic Games. We have neither the mandate nor the



capability to change the laws or the political system of a sovereign country. To give you an example, we can oppose the death penalty. But we are obviously not in a position to impose that view on a sovereign nation or exclude them from organising or participating in the Olympic Games. That is neither our mission nor our mandate.

There have to be clearly defined areas of responsibility. You cannot expect the IOC or any other sport organisations to solve political or human rights issues which generations of governments and politicians have been unable to solve. Within our area of responsibility, we stand for the promotion and the respect for human rights. This is our clear commitment. This reflects the values we are standing for. This is what the Olympic athletes show to the world. This is why the Olympic Games demonstrate that our values of a shared humanity are stronger than all the forces that want to divide us.

In this Olympic spirit of progress through dialogue, in mutual respect, let us continue to work together to make progress for human rights in and through sports for the sake of humankind.