



International  
Olympic  
Committee

The President

**Opening Speech of the 139th IOC Session  
Beijing, 3 February 2022**

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Dear colleagues and friends,

The global pandemic is still a reality for all of us. This is why so many of our IOC Members can only join us remotely today. This is also reflected in our IOC Session, where we had to adapt our agenda to the evolving circumstances of the pandemic, doing our part to ensure everyone's health and safety. Therefore, we will focus today on the immediate future. The more long-term issues we will discuss when we reconvene our IOC Session on the 20th of May.

We can address both the immediate and the long-term future of our Olympic Movement from a position of strength. I think I can speak for all of us when I say that in such uncertain times, navigating our Olympic Movement into this strong position was by no means a foregone conclusion. This was only possible because of what we achieved with our Olympic Agenda 2020 reforms and what is already taking shape with our Olympic Agenda 2020+5. The huge success of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 greatly contributed to this. And most importantly, it was possible only because we stood together. We were and we are united even in the face of great adversity and this is something we can all be very proud of.

Just over 6 months ago, we celebrated historic Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. Now with some distance, we can see much clearer what an overwhelming success this was. Just to remind us, one year ago, many had doubts whether these Games could take place at all. Only very few were confident that they would be such a success.

These were unprecedented Olympic Games and it took all of us an equally unprecedented effort to make them happen.

Most importantly, we made them happen in a safe way.

There was an overwhelming positive global response to these Olympic Games.

It became maybe more obvious than ever before that organising the Olympic Games needs the efforts of so many: the National Olympic Committees, the International Federations, the Organising Committee, of us the IOC, hundreds of thousands of volunteers from across the globe and so many more.

The athletes expressed their gratitude and their appreciation throughout their time in Tokyo. The first thing so many of them said was: we are so grateful that we can be here. They said this in interviews. At press conferences. On social media. Many of us had the privilege to experience this personally when we met the athletes in the Olympic Village.

Today, it us who say: we are grateful to the athletes for having lived the Olympic spirit in such a wonderfully moving way.

The athletes gave these Games a great Olympic soul.

They connected with each other in a special way, savouring every moment together after being apart for so long. Even with empty stands, they celebrated together with their family and loved ones, brought together by the OBS “Athlete’s Moment” video link.

These emotional and deeply human moments, touched the hearts of billions of people around the world and it touched our hearts. They put the spotlight on our Olympic values.

Even in pre-pandemic times, bringing the athletes from 205 National Olympic Committees and the IOC Refugee Olympic Team together would have been an achievement to be proud of. But against the backdrop of a global pandemic, seeing everyone united in Tokyo was truly magical.

In fact, the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 even set a new Olympic record in diversity. 93 NOCs won medals in Tokyo – more than at any previous Olympic Games. This clearly shows that our solidarity efforts are successful. Olympic Solidarity scholarship-holders won a total of 113 medals, as well as 185 diplomas.

Since for the IOC – at least officially – a medal table does not exist, I can unfortunately not tell you that if these scholarship holders were an NOC Olympic team, they would be tied for rank number one in this non-existing medal table.

All this taken together was appreciated by people from across the globe and from all walks of life. Be it from Heads of State, business and cultural leaders, scientists, our Rights-Holding Broadcaster and TOP Partners, from youngsters and kids – we received countless letters and messages saying: thank you for pulling it off. For giving us hope. For giving us joy. For showing us what really matters. School children were and are still writing to us, sending us paintings. They are full of new ideas for the future of the Olympic Games and their own future as Olympians.

Clearly the world was longing for this Olympic message of hope and solidarity. We know this not only from anecdotal accounts. We know this from concrete data. Over 3 billion people tuned in to Olympic coverage across linear TV and digital platforms. 28 billion views on digital platforms made these the first streaming Games. With new technologies and digital innovations, more sports fans interacted with the Games, making Tokyo 2020 the most engaged Olympic Games ever.

We all can look back on this with great pride and truly say: we did it. We did it for the athletes. We did it together.

Because of this, we all can look with great confidence to the future.

This future begins right here, right now.

Tomorrow evening, we will again make history – together with our Chinese partners and friends.

Tomorrow, Beijing will officially become the first city ever to host both summer and winter editions of the Olympic Games.

The Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022 will be the start of a new era for global winter sport. Well over 300 million Chinese people are now taking up sport on snow and ice in about 2,000 ski resorts and ice rinks across the country. This is why I would like to congratulate the Chinese Olympic Committee and the entire sports movement in China on this outstanding achievement. Today China is a winter sport country.

This progress has very positive impacts for China.

The increased physical activity through winter sport is contributing to health and well-being of the Chinese people. The over 300 million new winter sport enthusiasts are already now a great legacy of these Olympic Winter Games.

There are important economic benefits from this boom. The income from winter sport in China exceeded roughly 61 billion US dollars in the last season. In 2019, more than 100 million tourists visited the Olympic mountain regions alone.

When Beijing was elected as host in 2015, over 16 per cent of the residents of the Chongli district, where Zhangjiakou is located, were living in poverty. By 2019, Chongli was officially declared to have eliminated poverty. Today over 20 per cent of the residents are employed in jobs related to winter sports.

By 2025, China's winter sport industry is expected to reach 155 billion dollars in value. From this tremendous growth, the winter sport industry across the globe will greatly benefit because of the high demand for infrastructure, equipment and expertise.

This is not just an expectation. This is already happening now during the preparations for these Olympic Winter Games, where much of the technology and know-how have been provided by companies from the traditional winter sport markets. Whether it is about of ski lifts, snow making, winter sport equipment and much more – all those companies from all around the world will also greatly benefit after these Olympic Winter Games because this boom in China will transform the entire global winter sport industry.

Beijing 2022 is also showcasing solutions for a more sustainable future. From re-using venues from the Olympic Games 2008; to powering all Beijing 2022 venues with renewable energy; to minimizing environmental impacts and reducing carbon emissions – all these initiatives underline the commitment of Beijing 2022 to contribute to the sustainable development in China.

What does this extraordinary progress mean for winter sport beyond China?

It will change the global landscape of winter sport forever.

This opens a huge potential for the international winter sport federations. The sheer number of 300 million people means that global participation in winter sports is enjoying an unprecedented boost.

The athletes have the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reach not only their traditional supporters, but a completely new fan base of over 300 million people during these Olympic Winter Games. These Games are not the end of the story. With their performance and their appearance, each of these athletes can win over a huge new fan

community for the time after the Games. With this they can take their own popularity and the popularity of their winter sport to new heights.

All of this was not a foregone conclusion. Remember how it all started. Back in 2015 we had only 2 candidate cities to choose from: Almaty, Kazakhstan; and Beijing, China.

With the election of Beijing, you my dear colleagues and friends, have opened the door to this new era for global winter sport.

Today seven years after, everything is in place for outstanding Olympic Winter Games. There are magnificent Olympic venues for the athletes to shine. There are the highly effective COVID-19 countermeasures in the Playbooks. Thanks to this meticulous preparation with the well-known Chinese efficiency and dynamism, the athletes are enjoying excellent and safe conditions. Thanks to this, they can fully concentrate on making their Olympic dream come true.

Already now, I would like to express our great thanks to the Beijing 2022 Organising Committee, who will report to us later. I would also like to express our gratitude to the Chinese people and all public authorities for making this possible.

Over the next two weeks, the best winter sport athletes of the world will be fierce rivals on the fields of play. They will engage in intense competition for the highest prize, while at the same time living peacefully and respectfully together. In this way, the athletes will show how the world would look like, if we all respect the same rules and each other.

This is the mission of the Olympic Games: bringing the world together in peaceful competition. Uniting humankind in all our diversity. Always building bridges. Never erecting walls.

In the Olympic Games, we are all equal, irrespective of social background, gender, race, sexual orientation, or political belief.

We can only accomplish this mission if the Olympic Games stand above and beyond all political differences. This is only possible if the Olympic Games are politically neutral and do not become a tool to achieve political goals.

Our responsibility is to ensure that all athletes can come together for this peaceful competition. Also achieving this was not a foregone conclusion.

You may remember that at our IOC Sessions in January and July 2020, we could already see the dark clouds of the growing politicisation of sport on the horizon. We also saw that in some peoples' minds, the boycott ghosts of the past were rearing their ugly heads again. This is why we have been working even harder to get this unifying mission of the Olympic Games across to as many leaders and decision-makers as possible: the United Nations, the G20 leaders, intergovernmental organisations and national governments, individual politicians and many, many more. In all these conversations we stressed that the Olympic Games can only accomplish this mission, that we can only get all humanity together in all our diversity, if the Games stand beyond all differences and political disputes. We appealed to them to respect this precious mission of the Olympic Games.

Today we can be happy and proud that apparently this message got through. All the athletes, who have been overcoming great uncertainties in this respect for so long, can make their dream come true and compete at the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022.

This is thanks to the now wide support of the international community. This support is in particular illustrated by the Olympic Truce Resolution, which was adopted by consensus of all 193 Member States of the United Nations General Assembly.

This strong unanimous support was confirmed only a few days ago by a solemn appeal of the President of the UN General Assembly. We are very happy that following our invitation we can welcome both the UN Secretary General and the President of the UN General Assembly at the Opening Ceremony to support us and to support these Olympic Winter Games.

Significantly, this Truce Resolution recognises this mission of the Olympic Games. It calls upon on all Member States, and here I quote: “To cooperate with the International Olympic Committee and the International Paralympic Committee in their efforts to use sport as a tool to promote peace, dialogue and reconciliation in areas of conflict during and beyond the period of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.” End of quote.

What other event enjoys the support of all the UN Member States by way of such a resolution? At least I cannot think of many, if any.

We know that sport alone cannot create peace. We cannot take decisions on war and peace – this is the exclusive remit of politics. But when it comes to peace, also words and symbols are important. Because these symbols show us how the world can look like, if we all respect the same rules and each other. The Olympic Games are this symbol of peace and unity, showing us the way to a better and more peaceful future.

This is why we call on all political leaders around the world to observe their commitment to the Olympic Truce, so that these Olympic Winter Games can become this precious symbol of peace and unity.

We are very happy that just last night, we also received a very supportive message from Pope Francis, who is greeting the athletes assembled here in Beijing to celebrate these Olympic Winter Games, and who emphasised the role of the IOC and the IPC and of the Olympic Games, as he designated it, as “peacemakers”.



Of course our mission is always work in progress. While our focus today is on the here and now, we need to also set our sights to the future. The success of today only gives us the opportunity to drive the change for tomorrow.

This is why we will reconvene this IOC Session in May, to focus on our Olympic Agenda 2020+5 reforms. Then we will especially look at how we can strengthen our contribution to the realisation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Nous nous tournerons également vers les Jeux Olympiques Paris 2024, qui auront lieu dans un peu plus de deux ans.

A cet égard, je suis heureux de vous informer que les préparatifs avancent très bien. La vision de Paris 2024 s'inscrit en pleine conformité avec l'Agenda olympique 2020 et l'Agenda olympique 2020+5 pour des Jeux Olympiques innovants, inclusifs, durables et paritaires. En d'autres termes, ce sera le début d'une nouvelle ère : des Jeux Olympiques inspirés de l'Agenda olympique du début à la fin.

Les plans pour la cérémonie d'ouverture sont tout simplement formidables : six cent mille personnes célébrant les meilleurs athlètes du monde le long de la Seine, avec en toile de fond des monuments emblématiques tels que la Tour Eiffel ou la cathédrale Notre-Dame. Ce concept reflète parfaitement la vision de Jeux Olympiques innovants et inclusifs.

Ce n'est d'ailleurs pas gagné d'avance. Nous devons continuer à travailler dur chaque jour pour la réussite des Jeux Olympiques Paris 2024. C'est pourquoi, au lendemain de la cérémonie de clôture des Jeux Olympiques d'hiver Beijing 2022, nous dirons : Paris, c'est parti.

We learned that we could only navigate our Olympic Movement into this strong position we are enjoying now because we were living our new Olympic motto. So let us continue to go faster, to aim higher, to become stronger – together.