



International  
Olympic  
Committee

The President

## Opening speech of the 138<sup>th</sup> IOC Session

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Dear colleagues and friends,

You have received my written report, detailing the many measures we have taken over the past weeks and months to get to this point, where we can now finally see the light at the end of the dark tunnel. In looking back at this remarkable journey, I would like to reflect with you on a few points, so that we can together draw the right lessons for our future.

At the beginning of the pandemic outbreak last year we, together with our Japanese partners, faced a choice: cancellation or postponement. There was nothing in between. It was either cancelling or postponing the Olympic Games.

Cancellation would have been the easy way for us. We could have drawn on the insurance that we had at the time and moved on to Paris 2024. But in fact, cancellation was never an option for us: The IOC never abandons the athletes.

Therefore, we took the unprecedented decision to postpone the Olympic Games. Today, I can admit that we did not know how complex this would be. The only certainty we had was that rather than cashing in on the insurance, we would have to invest much more to make these Olympic Games possible.

There was no blueprint. Nobody had ever done this before.

We could only take this decision because of the full mutual trust between our Japanese partners and us. In fact, we came to an agreement with then Prime Minister Abe Shinzo in a phone call which lasted only about half an hour. This agreement still stands today,

with Prime Minister Suga demonstrating the same commitment and dedication to the Olympic Games and to their safe and secure delivery as his predecessor.

The pandemic had dramatic consequences for the entire world of sport. For our National Olympic Committees, for the athletes and for the International Federations.

We therefore set three goals: organise the postponed Olympic Games; support the Olympic community to overcome the crisis; emphasise the essential role of sport in society.

With regards to organising postponed Olympic Games, our collaborative work with the Organising Committee began the very next day after the decision to postpone. The first principle we established was that the Olympic Games need to be safe and secure for everyone. This principle still stands true today.

In this spirit we started planning for simplified and optimised Olympic Games with a focus on savings and reducing complexity. We also immediately planned for different scenarios under which conditions safe and secure Olympic Games could take place.

The Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee had the mammoth task of taking on the tremendous impact of postponement on their side. Tens of thousands of contracts had to be reviewed and renewed. The Olympic Village and all 42 sports venues had to be secured. Adjusting staff numbers and adapting tasks in the context of simplified Olympic Games. Just these few examples of so many alone give you a glimpse into the enormous complexity also they had to face.

Our shared top priority was and is ensuring safe and secure Olympic Games for everyone: the athletes and all participants, as well as our gracious hosts the Japanese people. Guided by technical advice from the scientific community and health experts from across the globe, we developed comprehensive countermeasures for all

participants. Compiled in three editions of the science-based playbooks, these countermeasures range from immigration requirements, to testing, social distancing, contact tracing, and many more.

All of us here in Tokyo have experienced these countermeasures first-hand so I think we can and we should all appreciate the great diligence and hard work that has gone into producing the playbooks.

On top of all the countermeasures, we are benefitting from our, the IOC's vaccination initiative. Thanks to our cooperation with different vaccine manufacturers, 85 per cent of Olympic Village residents and 100 per cent of IOC Members present here have been either vaccinated or are immune.

This is why today I would like to express our thanks and gratitude to all manufacturers who contributed to this unprecedented global effort. In particular, I would like to highlight Pfizer-BioNTech, who with their generous donation of vaccines not only to the Olympic teams worldwide but also to the volunteers, the staff members of the Organising Committee and to other Olympic Games participants from Japan, made a truly essential contribution.

I would also like to acknowledge the role of the NOCs in this truly worldwide vaccination effort. This extremely high vaccination rate would not have been possible without the excellent cooperation by the NOCs. They worked closely together with their governments to ensure the vaccination in accordance with each country's regulations.

In order to optimise and reduce the complexity, we put the focus on the essentials of Olympic Games: the sporting competitions. Everyone in the Olympic community had to adapt to this.

First and foremost, the athletes, who were living through great uncertainty during the pandemic. They needed to adapt their training, not knowing when they could see their coach or teammates again. Not knowing when to target their peak performance. Not knowing if or when the next competition would take place. They persisted through it all, showing so much determination and resilience.

The IFs adapted their sporting calendars and adjusted to the evolving circumstances. Through the hundreds of world cups and world championships, cumulatively involving tens of thousands of athletes, they demonstrated that yes, it is possible to organise safe and successful international sporting events, even at this time.

The NOCs demonstrated great flexibility and creativity to adapt to the context of optimised and simplified Olympic Games, allowing the athletes to continue their preparations for Tokyo. In the true Olympic spirit, they helped each other. They provided vaccines to foreign athletes training or competing in their territory. They helped one another to travel to Tokyo. They translated the playbooks to share it in their respective language groups.

Postponement also impacted our TOP partners and Rights-Holding Broadcasters who had to adjust their respective Olympic operations which were underway when we postponed these Olympic Games.

We can only look ahead to the Opening Ceremony of these postponed Olympic Games, because of this unified and powerful support. This is why I would like to express my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to everybody in our Olympic community for this truly outstanding show of unity and resolve.

We did it together. We did it for the athletes.

Our second goal was to support the Olympic community during the coronavirus crisis.

To achieve this, we established an emergency aid programme of around 100 million US dollars to support the athletes, the NOCs and the IFs, who were facing significant financial hardship.

To make the postponed Olympic Games happen, we set up a financial envelope of up to 800 million US dollars. Of this envelope, 650 million relate to the costs of organising postponed Olympic Games, while a second part of 150 million is an aid package for the Olympic Movement to enable everybody to participate in the Olympic Games. This is a very incremental procedure because you cannot put a precise figure in such a rapidly changing situation.

Furthermore, we increased the budget of Olympic Solidarity for the period 2021 to 2024 by 16 per cent to a total of 590 million dollars to give financial security to the Olympic community. With 25 per cent, the increase in the funding of direct athlete support programmes is even higher than the overall increase and includes for example Olympic scholarships for more than 1,600 athletes preparing for the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020.

Our third goal was to strengthen the role of sport in society during these challenging times of the pandemic. This is why we launched the “StayStrong StayActive StayHealthy” campaign already in April 2020. This was immediately followed by a cooperation agreement with the World Health Organization to promote a healthy society through sport. This is why we can be so happy that as a result of this cooperation, the Director General of the World Health Organisation will be with us in this room tomorrow and share his thoughts in a keynote speech. On Olympic Day 2020, half a billion people around the globe were introduced to our efforts.

Emphasising not only the health benefits but also the wider social and economic significance of sport in society, we continuously communicated with governments and intergovernmental organisations. Our message has obviously been understood in the

international community, as exemplified by the many supporting declarations and actions, most notably by the United Nations as well as the G20 and G7 Leaders' Summits.

Only by addressing these three goals together, we are where we are today, on the eve of unprecedented postponed Olympic Games.

When you look at this situation in hindsight today, it may appear like it was smooth sailing. This is far from the truth.

Over the past 15 months, we had to take daily decisions on very uncertain grounds. We had doubts every day. We deliberated and we discussed. There were sleepless nights. Like everyone else in the world, we did not know, I did not know, what the future would hold.

This uncertainty was reflected in the "Olympism and Corona" message to you in April 2020, where I tried to outline three different scenarios for how the post-coronavirus world would look like. Already back then, it was clear that none of these three scenarios would come true in their pure form, but would differ according to specific national, regional or cultural circumstances.

Some asked why we did not express these doubts. Some interpreted this even as a sign that we blindly forge ahead at any price.

Imagine for a moment what it would have meant if the leader of the Olympic Movement, the IOC, would have added to the already many doubts surrounding the Olympic Games, if we would have poured fuel onto this fire.

How would this have been perceived by the athletes, by the NOCs, the IFs, the Organising Committee, the Japanese government, our TOP partners and broadcasters,

or by the international community at large? How could we have convinced the athletes to continue to prepare for the Olympic Games by adding to their uncertainty?

How could we have convinced all the other stakeholders to remain committed to the Olympic Games if we would have even deepened their already serious doubts?

Our doubts could have become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Olympic Games could have fallen to pieces.

This is why, we had to keep these doubts to ourselves. This today I can admit and say it, it also weighed on us, it weighed on me.

But in order to arrive at this day today, we had to give confidence. We had to show a way out of this crisis. We had to provide stability. We had to build trust. We had to give hope.

Today I would like to thank all our stakeholders for having trusted in us.

This trust was built on the solid foundation we created for the Olympic Movement with Olympic Agenda 2020. With Olympic Agenda 2020+5, we will make this foundation even stronger.

Only because of this trust, we withstood the extreme stress test of the coronavirus crisis. We withstood this test because of the stability which is built on our unity and the trust of all our partners and stakeholders.

This stability allowed us to develop a vision of how not only to keep our values relevant, but to even strengthen them in the post-coronavirus world.

For us, our values were never in question.

The question was how to keep them relevant and to even strengthen them in this new world.

Our answer to this question is Olympic Agenda 2020+5. With this agenda, we put the many lessons we learned during the pandemic in action. Please allow me to just highlight two of these many lessons.

The first lesson is: we need more solidarity. More solidarity within societies and more solidarity among societies.

If you want to make the world a better place, like us, through sport, you have to start with yourself. You have to walk your talk.

With Olympic Agenda 2020+5, we demonstrate how we walk the talk by putting our money where our mouth is. We help, we care, we share. This is solidarity.

Only this solidarity makes it possible to bring the entire world together in peace at the Olympic Games.

We do so by reinvesting 90 per cent of our revenues for the benefit of the athletes and for sport worldwide. This means 5 billion US dollars per Olympiad of which also Tokyo 2020 will greatly benefit. We are in fact contributing 1.7 billion dollars to the success of these Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. In this way we make the organisation of the Olympic Games and the participation of all the NOCs with their Olympic teams from around the globe possible.

Our Olympic Solidarity programmes and actions demonstrate how we are walking our talk. It shows that solidarity runs strong in our Olympic Movement.



But this lesson of solidarity applies also to the big challenges the world is facing today. In this respect, we also want to make a contribution to society through sport. This is why the IOC is committed to be a climate-positive organisation by 2024. This is why we are committed to make the Olympic Games climate-positive at the latest by 2030.

The second lesson we learned is about digitalisation. In a world where connectivity continues to grow, digitalisation is already changing the way we live, work and do sport. In order to shape the post-coronavirus world with our values, we will use digital technologies to address people more directly, engage with youth and promote our Olympic values. One example of this is our engagement in virtual sport, where the inaugural Olympic Virtual Series has proven to be a great success.

This digital world comes with great potential and great challenges. If not managed responsibly, the risk is that digitalisation would deepen existing divisions in society. Our opportunity is to exploit the great positive potential we have and to reach people directly with our unifying Olympic values. This is what our Digital Engagement Strategy is all about: engaging with more people more frequently, spreading our message and values in new ways that connect people directly with the athletes and with our values. We have got a glimpse of this potential during our current digital and marketing campaign for the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. This campaign highlights the inspiring personal stories of athletes and the many human moments of the Olympic Games. With all these stories, shared with people all across the globe on all our digital platforms, we are emphasising the lesson of solidarity we have learned, spreading our unifying Olympic message that whether in sport or in the many challenges in life, we are always stronger together.

Solidarity and digitalisation are just two examples of the lessons that have learned and that we are putting into action with Olympic Agenda 2020+5.

Solidarity is at the heart of everything we do. Solidarity fuels our mission to make the world a better place through sport. Because we can only go faster, we can only aim higher, we can only become stronger, if we stand together – in solidarity.

Strengthening solidarity in this way also helps us to accomplish our 3,000-year-old mission to contribute to peace through sport. Without solidarity, there is no peace.

This peace mission was also central to the thinking of our founder, Pierre de Coubertin. Speaking before the Olympic Games Antwerp 1920 and during the last global pandemic – a moment in history in some ways strikingly similar to our times today – he said, and I quote: “Humanity must find all the strength it can in the heritage of the past in order to build its future. Olympism is one of those strengths.” End of quote.

In this spirit of our founder, I invite you my dear friends, and I ask you my dear colleagues, to contribute to build our future, and to rely on the strength of our Olympic community.