



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

Thomas Bach
President

Speech
on the occasion of
UN Event on Sport for Development and Peace
New York, 28 April 2014

The International Olympic Committee is very pleased to be here with you today, at the invitation of Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon – for this exceptional event that commemorates the power of Sport for Development and Peace and a fruitful collaboration between the IOC, the United Nations and its Member States.

On behalf of the entire Olympic Movement let me thank you for your appointment of Jacques Rogge as your special envoy. The IOC welcomes this appointment and supports it wholeheartedly.

The celebration of the very first United Nations International Day of Sport for Development and Peace on 6 April this year was yet another important sign of the strong relationship between the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee. It was a great step forward in our joint effort to place sport at the service of humankind.

On behalf of the whole Olympic Movement I would like to express our gratitude to all who made this significant day possible.

There are first of all of course all the UN Member States supporting this resolution in the UN General Assembly under the great leadership of its President, His Excellency Mr. John Ashe.

The UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, paved the way for this with all his determination as a brilliant advocate for the values of sport in society.

The UN Group of Friends of Sport for Development and Peace under the leadership of Monaco and Tunisia as well as Mr. Wilfried Lemke as Special Adviser deserve our high recognition and deep gratitude.

As defined by the Olympic Charter, the IOC's mission is "to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society combined with the preservation of human dignity."

As defined by the Charter of the United Nations, the UN's mission is to maintain peace and "to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character."

Therefore the UN Secretary-General comparing these missions was right in saying: "Olympic Principles are United Nations Principles."

In fact, sport brings our shared values and goals into alignment. The UN and the IOC know how much sport can do to address the vast array of human and social needs in the areas of: health, education, inclusion, sustainable development and peace – actually the key topics of the current Sustainable Development Goals Framework.

The contribution of sport to health is obvious with clear scientific evidence both with regard to prevention of non-communicable diseases as well as to cure and rehabilitation.

Sport is an essential part of education in two different ways. First, sport teaches values like respect for rules, teamwork and competitors like equality, like fair play, like self-confidence. And never underestimate the ability of sport to create joy of life. Second – most recent scientific studies prove the ancient Romans to be right with their saying: *Mens sana in corpore sano* – a healthy mind in a healthy body. Sport helps learning by providing better concentration capabilities and enabling students to learn longer with an even higher degree of concentration.

Sport is a great factor of integration. In our ever more diverse and individualized societies sport is the best, in some cases, even the only, bond that links people with the community, regardless of social, racial, political background. In this way sport creates identification and inclusion.

Sport is based on non-discrimination. Sport stands for understanding, respect and dialogue. Sport is always about building bridges. Sport is never about erecting walls. Sport needs peace and sport contributes to peace.

The culmination of this message of non-discrimination, of respect and of peace are the Olympic Games. And I'm very grateful to the Secretary-General and the President for having mentioned this in such a clear way.

The best ambassadors of these values are the Olympic Athletes. This is why it gives me great pleasure to welcome among us today the most successful athlete in the history of the Olympic Winter Games, the Olympic champion in biathlon Mr. Ole Einar Bjørndalen, and the silver medallist in the historic Olympic Marathon at Athens 2004 and recent winner of the Boston Marathon Mr. Meb Keflezighi.

I think we can all together also congratulate Mr. Bjørndalen, who was elected an IOC member by general election of all the athletes participating in the recent Olympic Winter Games in Sochi. Congratulations again and welcome to the IOC.

For all these values of sport, late President Nelson Mandela was right in saying: "Sport can change the world." He himself is an exceptional testament for this.

He together with his inmates in the prison camp on Robben Island experienced the positive effects of sport on their resistance, on their self-confidence, on their togetherness and team spirit, on their human dignity. After his release and election as President of South Africa, yesterday exactly 20 years ago, he singled out sport as a main contributor to social cohesion in his then still bitterly divided country and for peace-building on the international level.

This Olympic message and this plea I expressed in the Opening and the Closing Ceremony of the recent Olympic Winter Games in Sochi, when I said "to the political leaders of the world to respect the Olympic message of good will, of tolerance, of excellence and of peace" and when I appealed to "everybody implicated in confrontation, oppression or violence: Act on this Olympic message of dialogue and peace. ... Have the courage to address your disagreements in a peaceful direct political dialogue."

Unfortunately the political developments in the world since then force me to repeat this firm appeal today at this forum of the United Nations: Please have the courage to have a direct personal dialogue at the highest level in the spirit of mutual respect, good will and peace.

Yes "Sport can change the world," but it cannot change the world alone. When placing sport at the service of humankind, we need and we want partnerships with other players in society.

We are very much interested in partnerships with other institutions, foundations, and NGOs to co-operate in global development, especially in the areas of health, education, equality and inclusion, sustainable production and consumption and, most important, peace.

The IOC and its affiliated National Olympic Committees and Federations are eager to co-operate closely with national governments, international organisations, and in particular with the United Nations. In such a partnership sport can only bring its values to life if its basic principles are respected.

One of these basic principles of sport is non-discrimination for whatever reason, including political ones. Sport is the only area of human existence with a truly universal law. This universal law of sport is based on global ethics, fair-play, respect and friendship. This means for sport and sport organisations that we have to be politically neutral without being apolitical. This means for our partners that they have to respect this responsible autonomy of the sport organisations and the universal law of sport. Otherwise international sport with its unifying, peace-building, dialogue-enforcing and respectful effects cannot exist.

In this context I have one reason more to be delighted to be with you today at the United Nations Headquarters. The United Nations has always understood the co-operation with the IOC as a true partnership, actually recognizing our autonomy. This is a major reason why this co-operation is already so successful.

I would like to invite and encourage all representatives of national governments here in this room and beyond to spread this message of a true partnership in political neutrality on the one hand and respect for a responsible autonomy on the other.

To make this partnership effective and successful, to bring the positive effects of sport to all people, in particular to the underprivileged people, the inclusion of sport in the Sustainable Development Goals is essential. Therefore I urge all the UN Member States and the UN Secretary-General to make this historic step forward.

Today the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee will already make another historic step forward to better accomplish our common mission for humanity.

The IOC is extremely honoured and proud to sign today a Memorandum of Understanding with the UN, creating a framework for an even greater contribution of Sport for Development and Peace. The Olympic Movement is willing and ready to make its contribution to the most laudable efforts of the United Nations to maintain and build peace and to bring along social change.

Mr. Secretary-General, the International Olympic Committee is humbled, honoured and delighted to join hands with the United Nations to work together for a better world.