



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

Thomas Bach
President

Opening Speech for the 129th IOC Session Rio de Janeiro, 1 August 2016

Bem-vindo ao Rio de Janeiro!

Welcome to the 129th IOC Session in beautiful Rio de Janeiro. It is exciting to be here, just a few days before the Opening Ceremony of the first-ever Olympic Games in South America. As the world's attention finally turns to the athletes and the competitions, all of us feel the anticipation building. The Cariocas are ready, the Brazilians are ready, the venues are ready and, most importantly, the athletes are ready.

After I arrived here, I went straight from the plane to the Olympic Village to check on the conditions for the athletes. I was happy to see that the initial challenges have been addressed in a positive spirit of cooperation with great support from the NOCs and our Brazilian hosts. It is a truly exceptional Olympic Village for all athletes. From the many conversations that I had with the athletes, I can tell you that they really appreciate the Olympic Village just as they appreciate the excellent competition and training venues. This athletes experience is the most important because the athletes are at the heart of the Olympic Games.

It has been a long and testing journey to get to this point: for all stakeholders of the Olympic Movement, for our Brazilian friends and for the IOC. It is no exaggeration to say that the Brazilians have been living through extraordinary times. The political and economic crisis in the country is unprecedented. It goes without saying that this situation has made the final preparations for the Olympic Games challenging.

Only if we remember what everyone had to overcome, we will be able to truly appreciate the unparalleled efforts of our Brazilian friends. It puts their efforts into perspective and highlights their tremendous achievements. In a time when the country is divided politically, economically and socially, the transformation of Rio de Janeiro is truly historic. Rio de Janeiro would not be where it is today, without the Olympic Games as a catalyst. History will talk about a Rio de Janeiro before the Olympic Games and a much better Rio de Janeiro after the Olympic Games.



The extraordinary circumstances highlight the importance of teamwork. We would like to recognise the hard work of everyone in the Rio 2016 Organising Committee under the leadership of our dear colleague and friend, Carlos Nuzman. Thank you Carlos for your tireless perseverance. Our sincere thanks also go to Nawal El Moutawakel, the Chair of our Coordination Commission, and all her team for their great support and unwavering dedication.

Let me take this opportunity to thank all the Presidents and Secretary-Generals of the International Federations and of the National Olympic Committees. You have all demonstrated great solidarity. Thank you for your great contribution, understanding and flexibility under extraordinary circumstances. The Olympic family is always at its best whenever we are united in our resolve.

I would also like to highlight the crucial role of Mayor Eduardo Paes. His unwavering commitment and sheer boundless energy, made the difference. His vision was always that with the Olympic Games as a catalyst, you can transform the city. Today we can see that this vision is turning into reality. Thank you, Mr. Mayor, for your personal dedication and for being such a reliable partner.

We see the legacy of the Olympic Games is already transforming Rio de Janeiro. Just a few days ago, a study from a respected independent research foundation highlighted that thanks to the Olympic Games, Rio de Janeiro enjoyed greater and more equitable economic growth than any other city in Brazil. The study found that since Rio de Janeiro was chosen as host city, the per capita income in the city grew by over 30 per cent. This study shows also that it was the poorest segment of the population that has benefited the most from this growth.

Rio de Janeiro is transforming in different ways. In just seven years, the number of people having access to good quality public transport has risen from just 18 per cent in 2009 to 63 per cent in 2016. The new metro line, the expanded bus routes and improved rail network will benefit Cariocas for generations to come. Olympic venues will be transformed into public parks and recreational areas for the local population after the Olympic Games. The handball venue will be turned into 4 public schools.

The Olympic Games transform the lives of people. During my visits to Rio de Janeiro, I was able to see first-hand how a number of education and social projects supported by the IOC and many of our Worldwide TOP Partners are making a difference in the lives of many young



people. When I met these young girls and boys, I felt the confidence and motivation that sport gives them to succeed in life. Sport gives them the strength to shape their future and their communities. This is where we see the transformative power of sport in action.

This Olympic spirit of solidarity is also expressed in the creation of the first-ever Refugee Olympic Team. We will welcome the team tomorrow in our Session. They will compete alongside athletes from all other 206 National Olympic Committees. The refugee athletes will show the world that despite the unimaginable tragedies and suffering that they have faced, anyone can contribute to society through their talent, skills and most importantly, through the strength of the human spirit. The Refugee Olympic Team will represent the millions of refugees that have been left without a home because of conflict and war. The team will give hope to all refugees in the world. It will be a signal to the international community that refugees are our fellow human beings – that they are an enrichment to society just as they are an enrichment to our Olympic family.

In the weeks and days before coming to Rio de Janeiro, the IOC had to address the difficult situation regarding the recent allegations and revelations about doping in Russia. The findings in the McLaren report are very serious, in particular with regards to a system of doping allegedly orchestrated by the Russian Ministry of Sport. If proven true, such a contemptuous system of doping is an unprecedented attack on the integrity of sport and on the Olympic Games. Just after the report findings were made public a couple of days ago, the IOC addressed this matter immediately. With the Olympic Games just a few days away, we had to take action even though the McLaren report is not yet finished and the Russian side has not been heard yet. The decision of the IOC Executive Board was unanimous and it followed the principles of the Olympic Summit, which were also unanimously agreed by all stakeholders. We took immediate measures to shed full light on the allegations and more actions and sanctions will follow if necessary. With regard to the participation of Russian athletes at these Olympic Games, we had to take the necessary decisions. Because of the seriousness of the allegations we could not uphold the presumption of innocence for Russian athletes. On the other hand, we cannot deprive an athlete of the human right to be given the opportunity to prove his or her innocence. You cannot punish a human being for the failures of his or her government if he or she is not implicated. These principles are now being implemented. This decision is about justice. Justice has to be independent from politics. Whoever responds to a violation of the law with another violation of the law is destroying justice.



We have a busy agenda ahead of us at this IOC Session. As always, we should use this IOC Session to look further ahead to the future trends that will shape the role of sport in society.

If we want to make a difference in the world today, we must engage with youth. Young people including many athletes are living in a new digital reality. Young people are digitally “always on”. This new world has huge implications for the future of the Olympic Movement. With the many options that youth have today we cannot expect them to naturally come to sport. We have to go where they are.

Because these questions are so fundamentally important, we visited the heart of the digital world in Silicon Valley earlier this year. There we asked the leaders of the digital world the following questions:

Will there still be sport in 20 years from now? Is sport in competition with the digital world for the time of the youth? Can the digital world inspire young people to practise sport?

I am happy to report that all these digital leaders reassured us that there will still be sport in 20 years from now. They also wanted to make us believe that we are not in competition for the time of the youth. They told us that by embracing the possibilities of the digital world, the role of sport can even be enhanced. By making better use of digital channels, we can reach an even greater number of young people.

The challenge for us is to ensure that people do not just move their fingers to move a mouse, or move their lips to give commands to a computer, or move their eyes only to watch a screen. Our task is to inspire people to practise sport, to move and engage in physical activity.

At these Olympic Games, there will be more digital content than ever before. In fact, we expect double the amount of content on digital platforms than on television. These Olympic Games will be truly digital. You will see that we are already applying the lessons from the visit to Silicon Valley. New technologies like Virtual Reality, 360-degree cameras and many other cutting-edge digital advances allow us to tell the story of the Olympic Games like it has never been told before.

We are bringing the digital world right to the athletes. They will be among the first to benefit from our visit to Silicon Valley. Among the many opportunities, they will have the chance to engage with Gerald Andal, the first digital Artist in Residence at the Olympic Village. He will



produce video art on Vine. For all of you who are not familiar with Vine, like I was until a few months ago: this is a social media platform that allows you to share six and a half seconds of video clips. I have to admit that I was a bit sceptical when I first heard of it. But I was converted in about six and a half seconds after I saw the fantastic images and emotions that can be expressed. It completely captures the magic of the digital world.

Young people are living in this digital world and this is where we need to go. This is why I am excited to tell you that only a year and a half since we approved this project with Olympic Agenda 2020: we are launching the Olympic Channel. With the Closing Ceremony we will bring the Olympic Movement into the digital world. This will be another milestone for us and the beginning of a new journey. We will enter a new world.

With the Olympic Channel, the inspirational power of the Olympic Games will no longer be limited to seventeen days every four years. With this Olympic Agenda 2020 project, we will spread Olympic Values in between and beyond the Olympic Games. This digital platform will be available anytime, anywhere, on any device. Sport fans and all people around the world will have continuous exposure to Olympic sports and athletes, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

This represents a unique opportunity for everyone. This is demonstrated by the great interest and support we are getting from so many of our partners – from athletes, International Federations, National Olympic Committees, Rights-Holding Broadcasters, Worldwide TOP Partners, as well as from major social media platforms.

The Olympic Channel will continue to evolve, as the digital world evolves.

We are at an important juncture when we can shape our future. As our founder Pierre de Coubertin explained, Olympism is a pilgrimage to the past and an act of faith in the future.

Now is the time for faith in the future. A new world of opportunities is opening up for us.

Let us be united in this faith and shape the future together.

In this spirit, I now declare the 129th Session of the International Olympic Committee open.