



International
Olympic
Committee

The President

Vatican conference “Sport for All”

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Please allow me to first of all express my heartfelt gratitude for the constant support of His Holiness, Pope Francis, for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. His words and prayers are always a great encouragement for all of us in the Olympic and Paralympic Movement, and in particular for the athletes.

We are heartened and inspired by his appreciation for sport and the Olympic values, which he has expressed on so many occasions. At the same time, we know that his steadfast support for sport and the Olympic Movement also represents a challenge for us – a challenge for sport to display maturity, as he says, and at the same time, as we say, a responsibility to live up to the expectations placed in the Olympic community to promote sport as force for good in the world.

Our conference and the Declaration that we will sign today are the latest demonstration of our shared belief in the power of sport to make the world a better place. I would like to thank Our Holy Father, for this wonderful initiative that illustrates how well faith and sport can complement each other.

Both faith and sport share many of the same values that guide us to live together in peace with our fellow human beings.

His Holiness explained this connection of sport and values so eloquently when he said: “Sport is above all a tool to communicate values that promote the good that is in humans and help build a more peaceful and fraternal society.”

Also the founder of the modern Olympic Games and of the International Olympic Committee, Pierre de Coubertin, understood how closely faith and sport are connected through values. For Coubertin, the practise of sport was always linked to promoting the best of the human spirit: excellence, respect, friendship, solidarity and peace. He wanted to make the world a better place through sport.

He chose the Olympic motto – Citius, Altius, Fortius – inspired by the words of his friend, the Dominican priest Henri Didon, to encourage the athletes to always strive for excellence.

Today, we in the Olympic Movement continue to strive to live up to our humanitarian mission. As a values-based organisation navigating our fragile and confrontational world, it became obvious that today we can only live up to this Olympic motto, by working together in solidarity.

This is why last year, we have amended our Olympic motto to:

Citius, Altius, Fortius – Communiter.

Più veloci, più in alto, più forti – insieme.

Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together.

Today, in the presence of so many Olympic friends, I would like to express my deep gratitude to His Holiness for having given his blessing to this amendment of our motto, created by Henri Didon. Inspired by the support of His Holiness, I reiterate our commitment to our mission to make the world a better place through sport.

The word “Communiter” tells us: We need more solidarity. We need more solidarity within societies. And we need more solidarity among societies.

Communiter means: caring for each other.

Communiter means: helping our fellow human beings.

At the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 and the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Beijing 2022, the athletes were living our new Olympic motto in an outstanding way. Both editions of the Olympic Games took place under unprecedented circumstances because of the global pandemic. Each time, the athletes stepped up and amazed us with their response to all the challenges and adversity, showing all of us the best that humankind can be, if we come together in peace and solidarity. This reaction touched the hearts of billions of people around the world.

The significance of their performance went far beyond medals, personal bests or new records. To me, it was this spirit that really stood out. They showed us that no matter what obstacles we might face, we can only go faster, we can only aim higher, only become stronger, if we stand together – in solidarity.

In these difficult times – with divisions and wars on the rise – we need this unifying power of sport to promote our Olympic mission of peace and solidarity more than ever before.

At the Olympic Games, the athletes embody this peace mission when they set aside all the differences that divide the world. The Olympic Games are the only event that unites the entire world in peaceful competition. The athletes from all across the world compete fiercely with each other for the highest prize, while at the same time living peacefully together under one roof in the Olympic Village. This makes the Olympic and Paralympic Games a powerful symbol of peace.

But peace is about much more than setting aside differences. It is about creating a better world where everyone is able to flourish; where people are treated equally; where all forms of discrimination and exclusion have no place.

Pierre de Coubertin revived the Olympic Games to make such a contribution to peace through sport. He said at the time: “We shall not have peace until the prejudices that now separate the different races are outlived. To attain this end, what better means is there than to bring the youth of all countries periodically together for amicable trials of sport?”

Non-discrimination therefore is in the DNA of the IOC and the Olympic Games. At the Olympic Games everyone is equal, irrespective of race, social background, gender, faith, religion or political belief. The Olympic Games are uniting the one and only human race, sending this inspiring message to billions of people around the world.

But when it comes to building a more peaceful and fraternal society, non-discrimination in itself is not enough. It is not enough to just respect each other – we need to go a step further. We need to help and support one another. This means living in solidarity with our fellow human beings. Because: There is no peace without solidarity.

Striving for peace – this is a key value that Olympic sport and faith have in common.

In his inspiring message for the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Beijing 2022, His Holiness Pope Francis made this connection between Olympic sport and peace very clear when he said: “I wish the great Olympic and Paralympic family a unique experience of human brotherhood and peace: blessed are the peacemakers!”

While we are determined to strive for peace, we have to be realistic about our limitations. We know that sport alone cannot create peace. We cannot take decisions on war and peace – this is under the exclusive authority of politics.

And yet, knowing that we operate within these limitations, there is a unique pathway to peace for us. This pathway is about bringing people together in peace and solidarity.

This is our role: to support and strengthen pathways to peace; to foster and promote understanding and solidarity between people and nations.

In our increasingly confrontational and fragile world, we see how relevant our mission of building a more peaceful world through sport is in our times.

I cannot remember a time when the world faced so much turmoil and so many challenges at the very same time as today.

The scourge of war, climate change and economic hardship brings unspeakable pain and suffering to millions of people across the globe. As a result, more than one hundred million people had to flee their homes; separating families; forcing mothers, fathers, sons and daughters to live their lives in fear – unable to follow their faith, to pursue their dreams for a better life or even just to play sport.

This human tragedy comes at a time when the world is still reeling from the global pandemic that has reminded us how vulnerable all of us human beings are.

In light of this important lesson of humility, I reaffirm the determination of the Olympic Movement to build on the powerful sense of solidarity. We are convinced that it is only with solidarity that we can face the many challenges that are threatening humankind and our planet today.

The word “Communiter” in our new Olympic motto means that solidarity fuels our mission to make the world a better place through sport.

Solidarity is at the heart of the Olympic Games. This is why the IOC redistributes 90 per cent of all its revenue to support the athletes and the development of sport around the world. It is our responsibility to ensure that everyone has a chance to make their Olympic dream a reality.

Driven by this humanitarian mission, the IOC created the first ever Refugee Olympic Team for the Olympic Games Rio 2016. Since the reasons why we created this team persisted, we did so again for the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 and we will do so again for the Olympic Games Paris 2024. For the first time in Olympic history, refugee athletes competed side by side with the teams from all other National Olympic Committees, sending a message of hope and inclusion to all refugees in the world. Having no national team to belong to, no flag to march behind, no anthem to be played, and no home to call their own, we welcomed the refugee athletes to the Olympic Games with the Olympic Flag and the Olympic Anthem. We gave them a home in the Olympic Village. Our Olympic message is: you are our fellow human beings and you are an enrichment to our Olympic community.

Our work brings refugee and host communities together, improves their mental health and wellbeing. Our work helps young people through sport to find somewhere to belong again. Through our projects in Bangladesh, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jordan, Kenya, Turkey, Uganda and many others, we see that this support goes far beyond providing sport equipment or setting up sports facilities. Our UNHCR partners have told us many times that whenever they ask refugees what they need most after food and shelter, the answer is almost always: we need sport. That is because sport is about so much more than physical activity.

Sport is empowerment. Sport is inclusion. Sport is respect. Sport is health. Sport is building confidence. Sport is dialogue. Sport is solidarity. Sport is peace.

Sport is communiter.

We are also standing together in solidarity with the Ukrainian Olympic community. Since the outbreak of the war, we have been overwhelmed with an outpouring of solidarity from all across the Olympic Movement. I would like to thank everyone in our Olympic community who is so generously contributing to our solidarity efforts. Going beyond purely financial support, we are ensuring that Ukrainian athletes can continue to take part in competitions. We are providing travel support, training facilities, accommodation, equipment and uniforms.

What applies to Ukraine also applies to others members of our Olympic community. We are a global organisation. This is why we are supporting the Olympic communities in Afghanistan, Yemen and the too many other places affected by wars and conflicts around the world.

In this spirit of solidarity, Olympic Agenda 2020+5, our strategic roadmap for the Olympic Movement, is fully focused on strengthening the role of sport as an important enabler for the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We are supported in this by the Member States of the United Nations General Assembly, who specifically designated sport to play this enabling role in the areas of health, education, social inclusion, gender equality, promoting tolerance – and in particular, promoting peace. In fact, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres considers sport to be a global accelerator of peace and sustainable development for all. These and many other expressions of support make us humble – at the same time they encourage us to work even harder to promote the role of sport in society – and thereby to strengthen peace and solidarity in our world.

Any global challenge can only be addressed in solidarity. This is particularly true for the climate crisis.

Bringing about change has to start with yourself. This is why the IOC is already today a carbon-neutral organisation. To make this possible, Olympic House, our new

headquarters, is essential because it is internationally certified as one of the most sustainable buildings in the world.

Going further, the IOC is committed to becoming a climate-positive organisation already by 2024. To achieve this, we are committed to reducing our carbon emissions by 50 per cent until 2030.

All upcoming editions of the Olympic Games are already committed to being carbon-neutral. But going further again, the IOC will require all Olympic Games organisers to be climate-positive at the latest from 2030 onwards.

We in sport are always ambitious, we always want to do better, and therefore we very much welcome and appreciate the effort of the Olympic Games organisers in Paris to reach this goal of being climate-positive already in 2024.

To even overcompensate our emissions, we are partnering with the United Nations to plant an Olympic Forest with about 355,000 trees in Sub-Saharan Africa. But this project is not only about planting trees. It also comprises a solidarity programme to improve the lives and livelihoods of the people living in 90 villages in Senegal and Mali.

These are just a few examples of our full commitment in the fight against climate change.

Solidarity also defines our partnership with the Paralympic Movement with whom we share our cherished Olympic values. In 2018, we signed a long-term agreement until 2032 with the International Paralympic Committee, taking our partnership to a new level. It ensures the financial stability of the IPC and strengthens the visibility of the Paralympic Games. A demonstration of this new partnership, and indeed of our true friendship with the IPC, is that we talk in many respects now of the “Olympic and Paralympic Games”. In other words, there are no Paralympic Games without the Olympic Games: the Paralympic Games are made possible through the solidarity of the Olympic Movement and are another way we demonstrate our shared commitment to diversity, inclusion and sport for all.

Therefore I would like to express my heartfelt and sincere thanks to Andrew Parsons, the President of IPC. It was because of him that we could enter into this new era and build this

partnership and friendship. Thank you for everything you have achieved for IPC and thank you for this partnership and friendship.

Another such example of solidarity is our joint initiative with UN Women called “One Win Leads to Another”. With this initiative, a legacy of the Olympic Games Rio 2016, we have supported over 23,000 young women and girls across 120 community organisations in Brazil and Argentina, to empower them to lead in their communities. This programme will now be expanded to other regions of the world.

With our Olympafrica Foundation, we operate 42 sport and social development centres across 35 countries in Africa. The wide range of sporting, social and educational activities bring the joy and benefits of sport to hundreds of thousands of young girls and boys in local communities.

Guided by Olympic Agenda 2020+5, already 120 new projects have been initiated just this year by National Olympic Committees around the world, focused on promoting community cohesion, health and well-being and the Olympic values.

These are just a few examples of what we are doing to improve access to inclusive sport, to bring the social, education, and health benefits of sport to millions of people – every day, everywhere.

While sport and faith share many values, they also differ in significant ways.

Sport is not a religion.

For once, I will disagree with our founder and my predecessor, Pierre de Coubertin, when he said: “The primary, fundamental characteristic of Olympism is that it is a religion.”

Yes, like faith, sport can guide us on how to lead better, more meaningful lives. Like faith, sport can bring out the best that we can be. Like faith, sport teaches us the importance of living in solidarity and peace with our fellow humans.

But sport cannot give answers to the ultimate questions on the meaning of our existence. Only faith can give answers to the really existential questions of life and death and of the divine. Only faith can guide us in our acceptance of divine transcendence.

We in sport must therefore resist any temptation to define sport as a religion. We must be humble and limit ourselves to our very earthly pursuits. We must not give in to hubris of overreaching our all too human limits and remit.

Sport is not a religion.

Our remit is the Olympic Games. Our earthly pursuit through the Olympic Games is to bring the entire world together in peaceful competition. Sport can only play this unifying role, if it remains politically neutral.

But this is not enough. This neutrality must be respected by our partners in society. If this neutrality is not respected, then the Olympic Games would become divisive rather than unifying. If this neutrality is not respected, then it is just not possible for us to bring the entire world together in peaceful competition.

We live in turbulent times. There is a new world order in the making. We can see already today that this new world order will be more divisive than the one we are striving for.

This unfortunate trend alerts us in the Olympic Movement because it is going against our mission to unite the world. We know that in these divisive and confrontational times, we are not alone in looking for a common bond of humanity. Millions of people around the world are longing for peace.

Together with all people of goodwill, we want to make our humble contribution to peace by unifying the entire world in a peaceful competition at the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Our conference today is proof of this shared desire for peace in our times. This is why, in this Olympic spirit of peace and solidarity, I extend the hand of the Olympic Movement to

people of all faiths to work together for a better world through sport, for a world of solidarity and peace.

So let us go faster, let us aim higher, let us become stronger – together.