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Thomas Bach
President

Global Conference on Faith and Sport
Sport at the Service of Humanity
The Vatican, 5 October 2016

[Acknowledgements]

Your Holiness, please allow me to thank you for the wonderful initiative to hold this important global conference on faith and sport. All of us are united today in our shared belief in the power of sport. We are gathered here because we believe sport can change lives and make the world a better place. Sport is inspiration and it brings out the best in us.

Sport and faith are united in sharing many of the same values that are so important in guiding us how to live together as a human family.

Your Holiness, you have eloquently described these values that link sport and faith: "Sport is a universal language which surpasses borders, languages, races, religions and ideologies. It has the capacity to bring people together, encouraging dialogue and acceptance."

Sport and faith share many values, but there are also distinct differences. While sport can give us guidance on the here-and-now of living, it cannot give answers to the transcendental questions on the meaning of our existence. Sport does not have answers to the ultimate existential human questions of life, death or the afterlife. Only faith can give us answers to the big questions in life of why we are here, whether there is a God and what the divine has in store for us. Therefore, we in the world of sport have to resist any interpretation that presents sport as a kind of religion.

Sport and faith provide meaning to different areas of human existence. When taken together, sport and faith create a powerful force to serve the greater good of advancing our common humanity.

Like faith, sport teaches us the importance of living in solidarity and peace with our fellow humans. One of the many values shared by sport and faith is the respect for the dignity and equality of all human beings. In sport, like in faith, we are all equal. There is a universal law



of sport. The rules are the same and apply to everyone, no matter who you are or where you are from. The principles of equality and non-discrimination allow both sport and faith to promote our shared values of solidarity and peace.

An example of this is our Olympic Solidarity programme, which supports athletes around the world, especially from developing countries. This support, such as through our scholarship programmes, allows these athletes to combine their training with education. It gives them an equal chance of making their Olympic dream come true while giving them an educational foundation for their future.

Another recent expression of this solidarity was the participation of the first-ever Refugee Olympic Team at the Olympic Games Rio 2016. By creating this team, the IOC sent a message of hope and inclusion to all refugees in our world. The refugee athletes received an incredible welcome wherever they went in Rio de Janeiro and showed the world that we are all part of the same humanity. Their participation was a clear signal that refugees are our fellow human beings – that they are an enrichment to society just as they are an enrichment to our Olympic family.

Our promotion of peace culminates in the celebration of the Olympic Games, when the world's best athletes from all 206 National Olympic Committees come together in peaceful competition. During the Olympic Games, the athletes live together peacefully under one roof, sharing their meals and their emotions. In doing so, they set an example of peaceful co-existence. They show the world that it is possible to compete while living together in respect for each other and for the universal Olympic law.

Making sport a force for good was central to the thinking of Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games and of the IOC. Coubertin knew how well sport and faith can complement each other. It was therefore only natural that he chose the Olympic motto *citius, altius, fortius*, inspired by the words of his friend, the Dominican priest Henri Didon.

Ever since Coubertin's days, the IOC has continued to promote the values of solidarity and peace. With the adoption of Olympic Agenda 2020, we have addressed the growing importance of sport in society. We have opened a dialogue with society and we invite our partners from all walks of life to join hands with us to make the world a better place.



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Therefore, the IOC is fully aligned with this conference on faith and sport and wholeheartedly supports the Declaration of the Principles of Compassion, Respect, Love, Enlightenment, Balance and Joy.

In our fragile world today, shaken by conflicts, crises and mistrust, the message that our shared humanity is stronger than the forces that want to divide us, is more relevant than ever.

In this spirit, may this conference on faith and sport be the beginning of a common journey to promote our shared values and to make the world a better place for everyone.