



International
Olympic
Committee

The President

Opening of the 144th IOC Session

Ancient Olympia, 18 March 2025

Dear colleagues and friends,

The success of this IOC Session is fully secured. We had a rainy Opening Ceremony in Paris just before spectacular Olympic Games; we had a rainy inauguration of the Notre Dame Cathedral and the renovation proved to be a resounding success. And here we are, the rain is back with us. Nothing can go wrong anymore.

On rare occasions, we experience moments when we feel like the stars are aligning. Gathering in ancient Olympia for the opening of an IOC Session is such a rare moment. Today, we can feel our past, our present and our future aligning.

It is right here, where it all began. Ancient Olympia – the place that holds so much meaning for all of us. At the start of this IOC Session, let me therefore express our heartfelt gratitude to our gracious Greek hosts, who hold such a special place in our hearts. Greece and the Greek civilisation have given the world two wonderful gifts: democracy and the Olympic Games.

Greece is the birthplace of democracy. In ancient Athens, democratic principles were first put into practise. They continue to shape our modern society to this very day.

Greece is the birthplace of the Olympic Games. Over 2,800 years ago, Greece created this unique gift to all humankind. Right here in this sacred place, the Olympic Games were first celebrated. Already the ancient Olympic Games were built on values, as exemplified by the tradition of the Olympic Truce, the ekecheiria. This sacred truce allowed the participation of all athletes and spectators from the Greek city-states, who were otherwise almost constantly engaged in wars and conflict. Already then, there was this inseparable link between the Olympic Games and peace.

We are forever grateful to Greece and to our Greek friends for these two so precious gifts.

Dear friends,

Being here, right next to the first-ever Olympic stadium, holds an even deeper significance because we are also very close to the spirit of our founder, Pierre de Coubertin. Just a short walk from here is the stele where, in accordance with his wishes, his heart rests for eternity. In this way, the timeless Olympic spirit – ancient and modern – surrounds us, urging us to reflect and act on our shared responsibility as guardians of this historic Olympic heritage.

The Olympic Games and the values they represent have endured for millennia. And yet, the course of human history also reminds us of their fragility. The ancient Olympic Games came to an end, when political and commercial interests took over and pushed the values of sport aside. For centuries, the Olympic Games perished into oblivion. It took almost 2,000 years before the Olympic Games could be revived by Pierre de Coubertin. When he did so 131 years ago, as a young man – at the age of just 29 years – the values of sport were central to his thinking. He wanted to make the world a better place through sport and its values. He saw the Olympic Games as a way to promote peace among nations and people. He said: “Should the institution of the Olympic Games prosper, it can become a potent factor in securing universal peace.”

In a very hostile geopolitical environment, with nationalism and militarism on the rise, Coubertin managed to establish Olympic Games that brought together athletes from nations that were politically sworn enemies. Then as now, the athletes were ambassadors of peace. Then as now, the idea of promoting peace through sport was in stark contrast to the prevailing Zeitgeist. When we see today how Coubertin went

against all the divisive and bellicose trends of his time, we can only admire even more his courage and audacity.

This peace mission is the legacy that he has entrusted us with. It is these values that make the Olympic Games unique. As guardians, it is our duty to unite around these values. These values that should always remind us: we are part of something greater than ourselves. This is why we always have to put values first. This is our responsibility: to carry these values with humble dignity and pass them on to the next generations.

Most recently, the Olympic and Paralympic Games Paris 2024 brought these values to life in a spectacular way. Only because we stayed true to these values, we could finally bring together the athletes from the territories of all 206 National Olympic Committees and the IOC Refugee Olympic Team despite all the way too many geopolitical tensions and wars. They competed fiercely against each other. At the same time, they lived peacefully together under one roof in the Olympic Village. The athletes even came together before the opening of the Olympic Games to make a moving call for peace. This call for peace included athletes whose countries are currently divided by war and conflict. The athletes showed us how our world would be, if we all were to live in this Olympic spirit of peaceful co-existence.

When we pay homage to Pierre de Coubertin, we do so with humility on the one hand and confidence on the other. In this way, let us strive to fulfill our role as guardians of his vision: values first.

Dear friends,

Pierre de Coubertin once said: “The Olympic Games are a pilgrimage to the past and an act of faith in the future.”

This is exactly what this IOC Session is about. A sacred pilgrimage to our ancient past. An homage to our modern origins and to our founder. And a manifestation of our faith in the future, when we will elect a new President.

I am sure that – from their Olympic heights – the ancient Greek gods and Pierre de Coubertin are following us very closely. They will be pleased to see that we have returned to our Greek roots at this important point in our history. Here – even if for only a fleeting moment – our past, our present and our future are aligning like stars in a constellation.

With our hearts full of faith in the future, let us honour our roots and let us shape an even brighter tomorrow for our beloved Olympic Movement.