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It is quite an honour for me to address the participants in the XIII Olympic Congress, in representation of the National Olympic Committees. I thank the Association of National Olympic Committees, and specially, its President, Mr. Mario Vazquez Raña, for the opportunity to share with you brief reflections on one of the central topics of this important event: The Athletes.

I am in a position of privilege because I had the chance, as a high performance athlete, to reach the worthy distinction of being an Olympic Champion at the Olympic Games “Mexico ‘68” and I am now the President of a National Olympic Committee. I can talk to you, from both points of view: as an athlete, the reason to be in the Olympic Movement, and as a sports leader, who has the responsibility of guide and direct the athletes to reach the peak of their development.

We all are aware of what athletes represent in their true Olympic concept. Since the times of Pierre de Coubertin to the present days, a great strategic significance has been given to the formation, development and life of the athletes. The Modern Olympic Movement could not be conceived without athletes committed to their values and principles, and of course, there wouldn't be athletes as we know them today, without a strong and inclusive Olympic Movement, with recognized leadership, and a National Olympic Committee that supports them and leads them to success.

Since ancient times, the main protagonists of the Olympic Movement have been the athletes, and since then, they have earned the admiration, respect and love of the people, especially children and youth. Their examples have transcended in time due to their sporting feats; but above all, because this glory is part of the most valuable patrimony of the society they represent.

The highest symbol of the victory and honour of an Olympic Athlete in the ancient Games was the olive or laurel wreath. This high distinction was the expression of the glory conquered, based on honour, equity, justice, mutual respect and fair play. These Olympic Athletes for their sports merits and their moral and ethical values were elevated to the sacred category of real popular heroes.

Inspired by those traditions and by such a beautiful legacy, Olympism has been adapted, with known results, to the new times. Modern Olympic Games are the most important sporting event in the world. Athletes today have the same or even more value and central stage than in past times. The extraordinary vision and enthusiasm of Pierre de Coubertin allowed the restoration of the Olympic Games, to rescue and strengthen the values of Olympism and to place the protagonists of the Olympic Games, the athletes, in their rightful place.

The world is in constant transformation as well as in sports; there are new rules, the demands are greater, the presence of professionalism and commercialism have radically conditioned the work of the National Olympic Committees, of the International Federations, and the government policies and legal frameworks which regulate sports, and in consequence, the formation and lifestyle of the athletes; however, in spite of this profound transformations, the prestige and authority of the Olympic Movement has been elevated, the Olympic Games are valued more than ever, and the respect and admiration to our athletes have been elevated in greater measure, which has consolidated their condition of the idols preferred by the people.

Nowadays, an athlete who constantly struggles to prepare himself, or herself in their desire of winning, of being better, in his effort to surpass himself, a logical and natural effort in any athlete, faces strong barriers and pressures of all kinds, and if these factors are not properly channelled and on time, they can cause negative behaviours or attitudes contrary to the principles and values

that promote and develop Olympic Sport. Doping, cheating, foul play, violence and discrimination, among others, are the expressions that unfortunately are still present in sport, and that should be eradicated for the good of sport and Olympism.

The National Olympic Committees, in compliance with their attributions granted by the Olympic Charter and by their own Statutes, have the obligation of defending, supporting and preparing their athletes in the best possible way. We are, in great measure, responsible that they become true role models to be imitated by our children and youth: We have to prepare them to compete and win, but above all, to be able to successfully face the risks and challenges imposed to them by the new conditions in which they must act, marked by such tendencies and practices that result impossible to avoid, but if they are not attended to and controlled with due stringency, firmness, and constancy, they may derive in grave conducts and damages that can be irreparable for the life and health of the athletes.

In addition to this, there are other obstacles and difficulties of a decisive incidence in the behaviour of the athletes; among these, let me mention the inappropriate way in which the success of relevant athletes is conducted, the use of Olympic athletes in political interests and in detriment of their image, the interventionism by some governments in matters related to the athletes, the lack of consequent programs to stimulate, recognize and support the athletes and the absence of government policies to protect the athletes, from the social and working point of view, once they have concluded with their sports careers.

The mission of the NOCs in each country gets wider every year. We should be prepared for the future, the life for everybody changes at an incredible pace; a very eloquent example of this is the incorporation of new technologies and the role of the youth, including athletes. The Olympic education, the development of ethical principles and moral values, professional training, the fruit of their work and their social commitment are the objectives of the work of the NOCs that are necessarily subject to the constant impact of science and technology.

Just to mention an example, the internet is a popular and very extensively used media that constitute an open window to the World and a fundamental via of communication in these new

times. Web sites of dedicated athletes openly express their feelings and opinions, besides offering advice, that contributes with the promotion of Olympic values in general and those of the Olympic Games in particular. Athletes, who are publicly recognized, are now much more accessible and easier to reach out thanks to this new media. We can now be more attentive to their needs and support them in any ways we can, so that their opinions can be heard without censorship and have positive results proper of an outstanding athlete.

We in, the National Olympic Committees, are deeply committed with the formation of Olympic Athletes, not only in the aspects purely related to sports, as it is our obligation, but mainly in their formation as citizens, in their professional and technical education, in their conviction about the Olympic Values. Sports, through the most outstanding athletes, must contribute to the education of our children; it must support the efforts for a sustainable development and contribute to the promotion of solidarity and peace among the people of the World.

It is important and it has a great significance that the NOC's support the athletes with greater strength, so they can be, besides their sports successes, key factors in the promotion and spreading of the practice of sport and the respect of the Olympic symbols and values, specially in this new times.

The athletes of Excellence, the Olympic Athletes and specially those with exceptional merits, quickly become public figures of great impact. Their careers in the practice of sport, and in general, the way they conduct themselves, outlast their passage through sports. Young people who want to imitate their heroes look for all of the information there is about them on the Internet, it is no longer necessary to visit sports facilities or stadiums to know the athletes and their lives; today, just from a simple computer it is possible to access any kind of information, both sporting and personal, and even to have a simple chat with the any athlete they want to.

When I was a young athlete, like everybody of my age, I had my favourite sport heroes, my idols, my examples to follow and I wanted to achieve their same success and if possible, I wanted to surpass them. I used to go to their training sessions and watch them, I wanted to be like them, I copied every gesture, I asked what they did, how they lived, I wanted to know everything about

their lives and if I could greet them I asked for an autograph, I was the happiest kid in the world. I used to read and look for comments the press, radio and television. I wanted to be a high performance athlete; I wanted to be an Olympic Athlete. I am sure that like myself, there are many youngsters with the same concept in all parts of the World; that's why we have the duty and obligation to make sure this approach of the young athletes is in the correct way leaving a positive and lasting imprint helping them for their future development.

In many occasions a country is recognized in all the world for the achievements of their athletes. When an athlete of a little known country achieves success reaching outstanding level, the attention is on him, everybody is looking for the reasons that allowed him to attain such a honourable position; he becomes a role model, both for his countrymen and for the rest of the World. An athlete is much more than someone who is training, the Olympic athlete breaks borders, he open the gates of the world for himself, he harvests recognition and admiration for his country as a sports power.

Those of us gathered here in this XIII Olympic Congress feel a great passion for sports and we have a great interest to perfect it and place it every time in a higher place. The best way to contribute to this great objective is to look after and to protect the most valuable asset of our patrimony: the athletes. We should stand always at their side, help them to rise when they fall, cheer them up when things do not go as planned; and to guide them and make them see how important they are and what they can achieve. We have to help develop in them a full awareness of the enormous responsibility they acquire every time they wear the colours of their flag, because by expressing and representing the patriotic values, they summarize the best of their people and they are a symbols of national pride.

The National Olympic Committees always gives their maximum effort to fulfil the important role in working with the athletes; we have to strengthening even more the bond with the athletes, giving all of our support to the creation and functioning of the Athletes Commissions in the NOCs, and will coordinate their roots organizations and the national federations, acting as facilitators to look for a greater support of the National Olympic Movement and their partners and the governments of their respective countries. We have specific, shared obligations in the supporting the athletes,

and to translate them in concrete actions. We need to find the correct channels of communication among the parties concerned that allow us the integration of efforts in a coordinated work, directed to the selection, formation, preparation and professional development of our athletes.

It is sad to know that some sports idols, after their retirement from active competitions do not have specific professions or a decorous means of life. The NOCs should stimulate the application of programs to the professional formation of our athletes. Currently and due to the intervention of the IOC Athletes Commission, we have a program with the firm ADECCO that assists in the preparation for the athletes and supports them with their search for a career; this is an excellent initiative at this time only a few NOCs are involved. I consider that this program must be strengthened and widen, and I recommend all the NOCs to use this new option. The Mexican Olympic Committee applies it and even though it is in its initial stage, the first positive results can be appreciated.

It is of great strategic value that the NOCs devote more time, efforts and resources for the preparation of the athletes as sports leaders and administrators to allow that in a close future they can occupy responsibilities in a any sport Federation, in the National Olympic Committee or in any activities. It is important to convince the interested athletes that they have to prepare themselves, to study, learn and act with modesty and simplicity in order to become sports leaders, and to occupy a responsibility in the administration of sports. To become an Olympic Champion or Medallist, by itself, does not necessarily means that this person will be a good sports leader, this person has to be prepared.

I am certain that many of you as young athletes just like myself criticised and demanded sports leaders some things that I considered were necessary and I did not understood why they were not solved. Today, as the President of the Mexican Olympic Committee I understand the origin of some of the problems that we face and the limitations that sometimes we have to satisfy the needs of our athletes; however, because we experience the needs, we feel obligated to find solutions. We use our best effort to make our athletes understand that there are different ways for their proposals and points of view to arrive more quickly to the decision-making positions.

There could be material or financial limitations, but there should not be any kind of limitation in the communication between the athletes and the sports leaders.

The Olympic Movement continues preparing itself to face with success the great and complex challenges that it has in front. A magnificent example and an excellent opportunity in this line of action is constituted by the future organization of the First Olympic Youth Games, Singapore 2010. This innovative idea gives priority, in unity with the competitive aspect, to the formation, of education and culture. I am sure that this Olympic Youth Games will start a new age in the Olympic Movement in relation to the formation and development of the athletes.

I have the most absolute conviction that in order to guarantee the success in with the athletes in the long run, we must strengthen their education as well their professional and technical formation. Doping, violence in sports, egoism, discrimination and any other forms of exclusion, can only be finally eradicated when our athletes, coaches and leadership are fully aware of their responsibilities and are willing to face they with great firmness and dedication any manifestation or negative tendency that damages the fair and noble principles which are promoted by sports.

Dear delegates and guests, when I see the ample representation of all the social sectors of the Olympic Movement and their partners gathered in this XIII Olympic Congress; when I appreciate the great unity around the objectives and topics on the Agenda of the Congress; when I see the enthusiasm that cheers you up and your commitment with sport, Olympism and the athletes, I feel great satisfaction and enormous confidence in the future of the Olympic Movement.

I can tell you, very sincerely, that participating in this Congress and knowing all that has been done will guarantee its success, we, in the Olympic Movement, are prepared for the future, and above all, the ANOC and the National Olympic Committees will not fail their athletes nor the Olympic Movement.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH