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THE NATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEES AND THE DEFENCE OF THEIR AUTONOMY

During the past years, our Movement, and the Olympic Games in particular, have become the most important sporting, social and cultural event for humanity. The Games are involving, without any doubt, all countries, mobilizing their youth, and reaching millions of spectators through the media.

The revolution experienced by the media and the new alternatives they offer, combined with the sponsors' growing interest, have progressively transformed the Olympic Games into an event reaching beyond the frontiers of sport itself. Professionalism and marketing were two fundamental elements in this latter stage, without which it would have been impossible to reach the current levels of development and power for the Games.

A positive transformation took place, which benefited not only our athletes, but also all members of the Olympic Movement, its partners, its sponsors, and participating countries. The growth of the Games and the prestige of the International Olympic Committee, headed by our leader, President Jacques Rogge, aroused the interest of the governments regarding their athletes' participation and results.

It is indispensable to keep the fullest respect for the functions and responsibilities attributed by the Olympic Charter to the National Olympic Committees.

All members of our Movement are aware that in order to achieve a wider-ranging development of Olympic sport in each country and obtain better results in Regional, Continental and Olympic Games, we must maintain a close collaboration, within a framework of respect and harmony, between the governmental sports authority and our National Olympic Committees. Should this not be the case, these relations might come to be affected by particular interests or by political motives.

Conflicts are emerging in the five continents, due in some cases to interventions by governmental authorities into the activity of the National Olympic Committee, infringing its autonomy and preventing it from exerting the functions clearly established in the Olympic Charter.

It is an obligation for ANOC to supervise those cases in which the autonomy of the National Olympic Committee is intentionally violated, just as it is equally our duty to supervise those cases where the NOCs do not act strictly in compliance with the Olympic Charter.

We have recently held two Seminars at the International Olympic Committee in order to analyse and provide guidance for the autonomy of the Olympic and Sports Movement. Today, we have arrived at the Thirteenth Olympic Congress in a wide-ranging consensus as to the actions to be carried out in the future in relation with Autonomy.

The presence of over 130 Heads of State and Government at the Olympic Games in Beijing requires from us some reflection on the great interest in the Games. This new reality allows us to state that in the future, relations between the NOC and the Governments concerning the development of Olympic sport will be subject to different terms. This new profile requires from us clear and precise rules, as well as mutual respect and the will to work in a united way.

It is important that we analyse several concepts that may serve as foundations so that a global policy on the Autonomy of the Olympic and Sports Movement can come out of this Congress, and to recognize that our Autonomy is an essential condition for the development of sport and for the promotion of its values throughout the whole world. We must recognize that the Olympic qualifying process belongs to the National and International Federations, as it is they who establish the technical parameters and criteria to be met by the athletes. It must remain very clear however that registering athletes for the Olympic Games is incumbent solely and exclusively on the National Olympic Committees, as provided for extremely clearly in the Olympic Charter. It should be reiterated that the Olympic Movement is meant exclusively for those who freely and voluntarily show their interest to be part of it. This condition means that whoever belongs to our Movement is under the obligation of observing, applying and complying with the Olympic Charter. We must reassert the National Olympic Committees' will to collaborate with the Governments, based on mutual respect, so that Olympic sport becomes really and concretely the central point of our common action. It is necessary to consider, within the framework of the Autonomy concept, as provided for in the Olympic Charter, the sole and exclusive competence of the Olympic Committees to decide and determine the dress of athletes participating in the Olympic Games. We propose the creation of an Olympic and Sports Network between all members of the Olympic Movement. This will allow us to have available for us all the necessary information relating to Autonomy. Thereby, we shall be able to be informed on all cases, exchange experiences, and make

the analysis work easier as to how the Autonomy of the Olympic Movement is being implemented.

We must analyse possible modifications to the Olympic Charter which may contribute to greater clarity and precision in the rules governing the NOCs' Autonomy. We must define the process to be applied in cases of conflicts where our Autonomy is infringed upon. The importance of Good Governance and of transparency must be underlined, as they are essential elements to ensure compliance with the Autonomy of Olympic Organizations.

We are fully convinced that it is only by working together that we can meet the duties and obligations we all have towards Olympic sport and the youth of the world; if united – the International Olympic Committee, the National Olympic Committees, the International Federations and the Governments –, then we can reach our objectives.

Today, sport – a fundamental activity and the founding reason for the Olympic Movement – also represents a major priority for our governments. There is increased awareness of its extraordinary role in education, physical development, the creation of values, as well as the promotion of health and entertainment for the population, in particular for children and the youth.

One of the fundamental functions of our NOCs is to preserve our Autonomy and stand against any type of political, religious or economic pressure. All this is a fundamental precondition to reach the objectives we have set ourselves in the Olympic Movement, in relation with Olympic education, the fight against doping, the development of sport and the promotion of peace, brotherhood and solidarity between all peoples of the world.

The National Olympic Committees have great expectations as to the results that will emerge from our Olympic Congress. We have prepared ourselves with a great sense of responsibility, so as to contribute all our experience and adopt the decisions that will make us stronger, while consolidating the leadership of the Olympic Movement all over the world. For ANOC, it is of utmost importance to provide the 205 Olympic Committees encompassed with tools that will strengthen their Autonomy.

One of the strongest features of the Olympic Movement is Universality. We have the power to impulse it and make it a reality in all corners of the world. By consolidating this concept, we have given an impulse to the participation of the 205 Olympic Committees and their athletes at the Olympic Games. The principle of universality ensures participation for all, opens up the door for the less well off, allowing us to transform the Games into a genuine expression of brotherhood. It is the International Olympic Committee's objective, through the NOCs, to impulse and strengthen universality, which we have been consolidating day after day all along the past years.

It is complicated for me to sum up briefly the true signification of Olympic Solidarity. However, today, the majority of those attending here are aware of the benefits provided by Olympic Solidarity. Many years ago, when the Solidarity Commission was set up, what was sought was to work out a concept that would enable the Members of the Olympic family to have a close collaboration, establish bonds of solidarity, based exclusively on affection and brotherhood. However, today, thanks to our strength and unification, it has acquired a new meaning : Olympic Solidarity.

The National Olympic Committees have decided to establish a common fund with their corresponding income, currently their major source of financing, in order to prepare their athletes and consolidate their structures. This action has enabled the NOCs to implement a better use of financial means available to them, in agreement with the Income Allotment System established in our Movement. This is why this mechanism, providing for a common fund instead of sharing up the revenues, might be of interest to the other members of our Movement as it allows for improved utilization of these funds.

Olympic Solidarity is one of the strongest pillars of our Movement. The Olympic Committees decided, in order to be more efficient, to directly address their specific needs and circumstances by implementing a decentralization process for Solidarity Funds. This process has met with wide success and was implemented with the 205 Olympic Committees, making them more efficient and effective in their daily work, for the benefit of the sporting youth of their countries. Through the Continental Associations, we managed to promote a wider participation in our Movement.

Thank you very much.