

Sixth Global Ethic Lecture

Global Sports and Global Ethic

*By the President of the International Olympic Committee Jacques Rogge
at the University of Tübingen on May 10, 2006*

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to Tübingen, this prestigious University and to speak to you about sports and ethics. I was asked to answer the question whether the Olympic ideal can contribute to a Global Ethic.

1. What are the ethical standards of the Olympic Movement?

Olympism has to be understood as a concept which incorporates our cultural heritage, from the ancient Games, but of course also from Pierre de Coubertin's strong motivation to combine sport, culture and education and to promote the Olympic values such as respect, fair-play, pursue of excellence and joy in effort through sport and the Olympic Games. On a more individual basis, de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, was also rightly insisting that sport is combining in a balanced way the qualities of body, will and mind. The Olympic Movement is therefore much more than the Olympic Games and competitions. It is an educational and social Movement based on strong values and ethical norms.

All these values are laid down in the Olympic Charter, which is the reference for the Olympic Movement, not only for its overall behaviour and action but for its ethical behaviour.

The Charter provides to us the frame for our role in society. Sport, Olympism and the Olympic Games are a full part of today's societies. For this reason it is important for us that we are able to rely on our fundamental principles such as tolerance, mutual interest, universality, solidarity between rich and poor, and impartiality meaning that any form of discrimination on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the Olympic Movement.

As you can see: the Olympic Movement has a clear and efficient reference tool and our mission is to act according to these principles and values and to promote them worldwide.

2. Our opportunities and limits

The promotion of Olympic values is certainly the most important contribution of the Olympic Movement to a “Weltethos”, a Global Ethic. We are doing this in close collaboration with all National Olympic Committees, with all International Sport Federations and the media.

Through this promotion of our values we create a very strong link between culture, art and education, all disciplines that de Coubertin already considered as important pillars of Olympism. Taking into account the universality of our movement with 203 National Olympic Committees, the millions of sport clubs and hundred of millions of individual athletes as well as the broadcasters that are all contributing directly or indirectly to the promotion of our values, we can certainly stress that Olympism has a great potential to impact on the individuals as well as on society.

Further to the promotion of values we are acting also very strongly on the promotion of sport as a physical activity. The Olympic Games – summer and winter – are a catalyst with the best athletes from around the world attracting billions of spectators and sharing emotions. These athletes are at the same time models for the youth and ambassadors for the Olympic ideals. Elite sport has through these athlete models a direct impact on grass root sports and promotes physical activities, particularly for young people. Needless to say how important this is in today’s world where children are addicted to video-games, DVD’s, computers and the internet, resulting in a lack of movement, a decline in fitness and an increase of obesity.

Can all this contribute to a better world?

I see it impact on different levels.

The Olympic values contribute to a better understanding amongst nations. The Olympic Games are the unique event where young people from all countries of the world are celebrating at the same time and the same place an ideal. Billions of spectators in front of TV screens are sharing this spirit of the Games, which is lead by strong symbols such as the rings, the flag and the Olympic flame.

The better understanding of nations can also be illustrated by the initiative taken by the Korean National Olympic Committees to march during the Seoul Games – and afterwards also in Athens and Turin – jointly into the stadium. We remember of course also the unified German teams that entered into the Olympic stadiums in Melbourne (1956), Rome (1960) and Tokyo (1964) under a flag with the nation’s colours and the Olympic rings stamped on it. These are extremely strong symbolic acts that have their impact.

On an individual basis these values help people to respect each other, to learn that rules exist and how important is to respect them. Sport teaches also how to handle differences and allows in an ideal way to integrate minorities.

Can the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement contribute to peace?

Again we have to distinguish different levels:

On a symbolic level we launch all two years the Olympic truce appeal to remind the world's population of the origin of the Olympic Games. During more than 1000 years from 773 BC to 394 AD every four years the weapons were laid down during the Games. As a minimum we expect today that the athletes from all nations, particularly those in conflict situations can also participate at the Games. We remember the participation of the Iraq NOC, which the IOC helped to re-integrate in 1993/1994 very quickly into the Movement and to participate at the Athens Games where the success of their football team fulfilled a suffering country for a few moments with pride, respect and joy.

We are no utopians. Sport will not bring and enforce permanent peace but it is our movement's responsibility to regularly and symbolically call for peace.

On a more political level the IOC has taken several times in its history a firm stand in order to contribute to a more peaceful society. I think particularly the expulsion of the South African National Olympic Committee from the Olympic Games (1964) and from the Olympic Movement (in 1970) during the Apartheid regime. The IOC has been instrumental to isolate the regime and contribute also quickly to reintegrate the country into the International community once the regime was abolished – in 1992 right before the Barcelona Games. Interesting to note that a sport like rugby on one hand contributed to the tension between nations which resulted to a boycott of the Montreal Olympic Games (1976) by several African nations, but on the other hand, that this same sport, particularly the World Cup event staged in 1995 in South Africa, saw for the first time black and white Africans celebrating together their world champion team.

Other moments in the Olympic history can be seen from an ethical point of view. I think particularly of the two Games of the Olympiad staged in your country, with Berlin 1936 which was supposed to become a promotion platform for a totalitarian system and Munich 1972 where one of my predecessors, Avery Brundage, had to inform the world about the tragedy that took place in the Olympic village; stopped the Games for the commemoration of the victims but than also announced that "The Games must go on". In both situation the Olympic movement was put in front of a dilemma and had to take crucial decisions.

In Berlin it were the athletes themselves who proved to be the most efficient tool to underline the values of the Movement, with the American Jessie Owen and the German Lutz Long fraternizing openly in the Olympic Stadium after the win of the black American over the German in the long jump event. These are important moments of the Olympic history, which show that the strength of sport and friendship can bring down barriers between nations.

3. Which threats menace the Olympic ideal?

There are of course several dangers that menace the Olympic ideal. We have to acknowledge them and face them.

Doping is certainly one of the most important dangers. Doping stands for a clear violation of three of our most important values: respect, fair-play and the protection of the athletes health. Doping not only puts a dark shadow on the athletes and their performances but also on their environment with medical doctors and scientists helping the athletes to cheat. It is the lack of the deontology of representatives of these prestigious professions that unfortunately also contribute to tarnish the sport and its values. The IOC is fighting with all means against doping by applying its “zero tolerance policy”, but unfortunately we are often one step behind the latest scientific findings. Should we give it up? Certainly not. Doping is to sport what criminality is to society, it will never totally disappear, but it is our duty to bring it down to the lowest level.

We must also protect the health of the athletes. From the medical and psychological point of view we have a problem with overtraining of the athletes for competition, particularly also young athletes. “*Citius, altius, fortius*”, the motto of the Olympic Olympic is being perverted. That all the athletes, professional and grassroots, want to strive for the best is part of the Olympic philosophy, but it has to be kept on a human level. Therefore I clearly appeal for a sport based not only on performance but also on values.

Another danger comes from the commercialization of sport. It is interesting to see that the public oversees that the Olympic Games are the only sport event worldwide that has a so called “clean venue policy”. There is no publicity allowed in the Olympic stadia and the athletes are not allowed to wear the logos of their sponsors on their outfits. We stick to this policy as we consider this direct association of commerce and sport in the stadia not favourable for the Olympic spirit.

Nevertheless the Olympic Games are often seen as a commercial product driven by our sponsor-partners and the broadcasters that pay important sums for TV rights. They pay these rights for the only reason to be associated directly with the most

prestigious sport event and with the most powerful brand, the Olympic rings. On our side we are using this revenue (around 5 billion US\$ for 2010 and 2012) to support the Organising Committees for the Olympic Games, the National Olympic Committees and the Sports Federations. For the latter, particularly the smaller Federations, the funds raised through the Olympic Games are often their only revenue and are essential for them to act independently and to promote their sport and the values properly. We redistribute 92% of our revenue for sport development. For the IOC the revenue is a means and not an end. Broadcasters and sponsors will not be allowed to interfere in the rules and regulations of the Games or the Olympic programme.

Revenue can also easily be linked to another issue that has become more and more difficult to handle: corruption. We can take as example the corruption of referees and athletes linked to betting. Germany has experienced such a scandal and we cannot close our eyes. Transparency, particularly in regard with financial issues, has to be a prerequisite for the ethical governance of all sports organizations, sport administrations and also individual members of these organisations. The IOC has put in place an independent ethical commission that looks into any cases that might be linked to corruption suspicions of its members and we do not hesitate to expel them in case that a violation of our rules has been proved.

Racism and violence are two other phenomena that can put sport in danger. Fortunately enough the phenomena have not yet reached the Olympic stadia but we have to face the challenge together with all sports federations. Sport arenas can become the platform of expression for social problems. In this particular fight, as in others, sport has to find a strong alliance with governments in order to find solutions. Laws against hooliganism and racism are one thing, but the problems have to be tackled at their roots.

4. What is the IOC doing to face these challenges?

To all the dangers that menace the Olympic ideal we have developed strategies to fight against them. However, we do not want that these menaces to dictate our agenda. For these reason we have developed together with all the family members of the Olympic Movement other activities (1) in the frame of the Olympic Games, (2) for the development of sport and (3) for the development of our society through sport.

In the frame of the Olympic Games the notion of sustainable development is today an integral part of the objective setting of all host cities and host countries that are staging the Olympic Games. They have to prove that that their candidature is based on a strong legacy for future generations and that they are basing their project on a strategy that takes into account the equilibrium of the economic, social and

environmental impact of the Games. It is our duty to learn from mistakes that have been made in the past and for this reason we have put in place a knowledge-transfer-system between the Organising Committees of former and future Games. Further a specific IOC commission has been put in place and has expressed recommendations how to keep the costs and complexity of the Games on a reasonable level.

The IOC has also a social responsibility. The development of sport is part of it and benefits particularly the developing countries. A large share of the TV rights revenue is made available to the developing countries through the Olympic Solidarity Foundation, which supports the sport and through sport the society of these countries. The IOC supports also infrastructure and employment projects such as Olymp'Africa centers in different countries in Africa.

The development of sport is also in the centre of our sport for all commission, which strives to promote grassroots sport all over the world. We support also sport for disabled particularly through a very close cooperation with the International Paralympic Committee.

Sport on the other hand offers also an ideal platform to assist people in their daily life. For this reason we have developed close collaborations with a multitude of UN agencies (UNHCR, UNEP, UN Aids, etc) and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations. We have for example developed together with UN Aids an information tool kit specifically for sports clubs and coaches so that they can sensitize their members in an efficient way on the dangers of HIV / AIDS.

We are organizing workshops on a regular basis with National Olympic Committees to share experience on peace initiatives that can be undertaken in countries that are in conflict or post-conflict situations.

We have a program to promote women in sports, which strives to enable young girls and women to practice sport at the same level as boys and men or to take more responsibilities in sport administrations in their countries.

For the athletes we have put up a programme, which enables them to reintegrate after their career easier into civil society. These athletes give so much to the

Olympic Movement and the public and often find it difficult to return to a normal life. We have the duty to help them.

These examples show that we are taking social responsibility, but I am also fully aware that we can and have to do more.

5. Conclusion

I come back to the initial question whether sport can contribute to a Global Ethic. I have illustrated that we have the means and the possibilities to contribute, but that there are also serious threats menacing sport and the Olympic ideal. We have to recognize them for what they are and fight against them with all possible means.

Thank you for your attention.