

# SPEECHES

given at the solemn opening Ceremony of the Session

*Sunday May 6th 1951*

## Speech of the Dr. Joseph Gerö

*Federal Minister ret.,*

*President of the Austrian Olympic Committee*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Austrian Olympic Committee, I have the honour to welcome you, and to express my satisfaction that so large a number of guests have followed our invitation which proves the interest you hold in the Olympic idea.

We are especially pleased that His Excellency, the Federal Chancellor, is present at this meeting and that despite the important tasks you are charged with you are kind enough to participate in the Opening of the Congress of the International Olympic Committee to show the interest you take in all questions connected with sports.

Our Chancellor accepted this task as a legacy after our unforgettable President Dr. Karl Renner, the patron of the Austrian Olympic Committee, who not only recognised the Olympic idea, but also appreciated the high value of its aims for the conciliation of nations.

This ceremony gives me a chance to thank you from all my heart before this choice audience that in your capacity as the head of the Government on request of the Austrian Olympic Committee you have been kind enough to use his influence in favour of the Meeting of the International Olympic Committee in Vienna. I wish to express my thanks also to the Vice-Chancellor and to the whole Austrian Government for promoting the Olympic Movement.

By experience I know that the Federal Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor, and all the other members of the Government have recognised the value of the sport for the public health as well as for the development of cultural life in Austria, and I am happy that we may count with the powerful support of our Government even in the most difficult situations. For if the Olympic idea shall succeed, we must be sure of the support of our authorities.

Today we have assembled here in a festive mood to celebrate the solemn opening of the Congress of the International Olympic Committee in 1951. May I now explain in short the nature, the aims and the organisation of the Olympic Games. Long before Christian times the Greeks, divided into a number of small states, organised contests of the young. The best sportsmen of Greece assembled in Olympia, every four years to fight in peaceful contests for the palm of victory. During these periods any disputes and armed conflicts were suspended and the young Greeks knew no other aim but to be victorious in these Olympic contests. Loyal to tradition the ancient Greeks fostered the custom of the Olympic Games throughout the centuries and even based their chronologic records on these periodic games. With the decay of the Greek Empire the Olympic

Idea, based on the peace among the people, gradually faded away. The merit to have revived the Olympic Games is due to the Baron de Coubertin who reintroduced the Olympic sport towards the end of the XIXth century. Apart from a few insignificant modifications the organisation scheme he introduced together with his co-operators has been maintained up to our times. The organisation and the periodic arrangement of the revived Olympic Games has been entrusted to the International Olympic Committee which uses to hold annual meetings like that we are going to hold now in Vienna upon the invitation of the Austrian Government.

The members of the International Olympic Committee and the delegates of all 22 International Federations of the sports represented at the Olympic Games will participate in these meetings. The International Olympic Committee recognises 73 National Olympic Committees of almost all countries of the world represents the Olympic idea and so the highest authority in sports. The National Federations of the different sports are affiliated to the International Sport Organisations. So it comes that all civilised nations of the world apply the same common rules issued by the international federations in their lines of sport. We may say that the meeting of the International Olympic Committee represents the whole nations united by sport, similar — so to say — to the U. N. O. For the second time after the revival of the Olympic Games, Vienna has the honour to be chosen as meeting place for an Olympic Session. The first one held in this city took place in June 1933, some 20 years ago.

Nobody could foresee at that time the dreadful disasters that would shake the world and cause such tremendous, changes in the field of sports. During this period events of great importance occurred that wrapped in gloom the traditions maintained during so many centuries. Even in this little country, Austria, the last 20 years have not elapsed without leaving traces. The war, the occupation have left deep wounds not only in the country but also in the city of Vienna. But despite these concussions, one thing survived — you may see it with your own eyes — the enthusiasm of the Austrian people for the Olympic Movement, and the strong will to live in peace with all nations of the world.

This point of view of the Austrian people is easily comprehensible, as Austria was among the first countries to recognise the significance of the Olympic Movement for the development of humanity. An Austrian team already participated in the first Olympic Games in 1896. At that time their number was limited to 4 athletes among the 285 young enthusiasts of sport from 13 different countries who fought for the palm of victory in the wonderful marble stadium of Athenes. Yet from these modest beginnings the great style of our present Olympic Games developed. 4146 athletes of 59 countries of all continents assembled in London in 1948, in order to participate in the XIVth Olympic Games, the greatest sports event of history. We were proud to count 115 Austrians among them, who thanks to the support of our Government were able to participate in the Games. This gigantic and rapid development was due to the fact that the leaders of sports in any country were firmly convinced that these contests of the young, requiring hard work and sacrifices, served a higher aim.

The Olympic idea has been strong enough to overcome gloriously all crises and revolutions humanity had to undergo during these last hard years and this may prove the deep morale of this movement which teaches the young that the most important thing is not to win a prize in these Games, but to participate in them together with their comrades cherishing the same ideals.

Thanks to the fundamental principles pronounced by Pierre de Coubertin, the Olympic idea became the cornerstone of our great aim, the physical training of the young.

Austria is fully aware of this aim of the Olympic Movement. I state with satisfaction that Olympic laurels were awarded to Austrians, both in sports and arts, which made the name of our country famous far beyond its borders. Our country is but small, but nevertheless we always aimed at playing a honourable part in the field of international sports and at maintaining most friendly relations to all the nations of the world.

In order to give more stress to our efforts the Austrian Olympic Committee requested the Government to invite the International Olympic Committee to hold one of their meetings in Vienna. With great pleasure we learned at the Session at Copenhagen last year that the invitation of the Austrian Government had been accepted and that the meetings of 1951 would be held in Vienna.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I feel it my duty to express you my warmest thanks for having come to our city. You may be sure that we shall do our best to make your stay here as agreeable as possible and we hope you will remember us well. It is our aim to give you a favourable impression of our country and its population, so that you will understand the importance the Austrian people attaches to the peaceful work of the Olympic Movement, and how eager they are to re-unite with all other peoples of the world in the Olympic community.

May I wish therefore, in the name of the Austrian Olympic Committee, that the activities of your Session here in Vienna, will be most successful to the best of humanity and to the glory of sports.

