



The Olympic Truce

by Fekrou Kidane

Due to the disintegration of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the armed conflicts that ensued, the United Nations Security Council created a Sanctions Committee against this country in 1991. In resolution 757 of 1992, the Security Council included “sport” for the first time as a component of sanctions; whence the IOC’s concern with this political decision, which came on the eve of the opening of the Games of the XXV Olympiad in Barcelona.

After several consultations, the IOC opted to reaffirm its independence, to defend the interest of the athletes, to protect the Olympic Games and to consolidate the unity of the Olympic Movement. On 21 July 1992, the 99th IOC Session launched an appeal to all states and international and national organizations, and requested its President to engage in discussions with the United Nations. Finally, a compromise was reached and the Sanctions Committee of the United Nations Security Council approved the IOC’s proposal to allow athletes from Yugoslavia to participate on an individual basis. The UN also invited the IOC to take responsibility for selecting the athletes and communicate the list to the Spanish government for their entry into its territory. The IOC granted provisional recognition to the NOC of Bosnia-Herzegovina and invited it to participate in the Games to the XXV Olympiad in Barcelona.

document in support of the appeal was signed by members of the Executive Board, the presidents and secretaries general of ASOIF, AIWF, ANOC, and by representatives of 184 National Olympic Committees. The document, entitled “Olympic Truce”, was present-

ed to the then Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, by the IOC President on the occasion of a meeting in New York in February 1993. At that meeting, President Samaranch expressed the desire to see the 48th Session of the United Nations General Assembly adopt a resolution in favour of the Olympic Truce. He further suggested that a second resolution be submitted to the General Assembly for its consideration, namely to proclaim 1994 the International Year of Sport and the Olympic Ideal in order to mark the centennial anniversary of the IOC. The Secretary General of the United Nations endorsed the IOC initiative and pledged his own personal support for it.

Having secured the support of the UN, the IOC President then wrote to all Heads of State and government, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of Youth and Sports in the world requesting their support for the adoption of the above-mentioned resolution. The IOC members and NOCs were requested to convey these letters to their addressees. The reception given to the IOC initiative was impressive. First of all, the fact that the world’s political leaders responded and subscribed to initiatives launched by a non-governmental body - the IOC - was a source of satisfaction for the Olympic Movement. Greece, the birthplace of Olympism, and France, the country of Baron Pierre de Coubertin, renovator of the modern Olympic Games, but also countries facing armed conflicts, were among those which responded favourably. This new diplomatic approach ‘seemed, in the

light of the various replies, to have given rise to pertinent statements on peace in the world.

The institution of the Truce, or *Ekecheiria*, was established in Ancient Greece in the 9th century BC by the signing of a treaty between three kings, Iphitos of Elide, Cleosthenes of Pisa and Lycurgus of Sparta. Subsequently, all the other Greek cities ratified this “international agreement”, thanks to which the permanent and recognized immunity of the sanctuary of Olympia and the region of Elide became a reality. In addition, during this truce period, athletes, artists and their families as well as ordinary pilgrims could travel in total safety to take part in or to attend the Olympic Games, and then return to their respective countries. As the beginning of the Games approached, the sacred truce was called for and announced by the Spondophoroi, citizens of Elide who travelled from city to city around the entire Greek world to deliver the message.

On 25 October 1993, the 48th Session of the United Nations General Assembly adopted without vote, that is to say unanimously, a resolution co-sponsored by 121 Member States on the observance of the Olympic Truce. This is the first time in the history of the Olympic Movement that a large-scale operation has been launched in favour of peace. The IOC’s satisfaction arises not solely from the fact that it has translated into concrete actions the fundamental principles contained in the *Olympic Charter*; but also from the mobilization of the political world in favour of its project. Speaking through its President, the IOC considered that it had a moral obligation to put forward

and attempt to enforce the Olympic Truce in the hope that it would serve dialogue and reconciliation and the search for lasting solutions of all armed conflicts. The Olympic Movement, which forms an integral part of society, felt therefore bound to take a number of initiatives.

The IOC firmly committed itself by launching an appeal to observe the Olympic Truce on the occasion of the XVII Olympic Winter Games in Lillehammer, Norway, in 1994. The IOC also addressed the parties to the conflict, and its President held talks with the Heads of State and political leaders of countries involved, urging them to respect the Olympic Truce. An IOC delegation led by its President even travelled to Sarajevo during the period of the Truce to express its solidarity with

the city that had hosted the XIV Olympic Winter Games in 1984. This trip was arranged thanks to the good offices of the actual Secretary General of the United Nations, Koffi Annan, who was at that time Under-secretary General in charge of peace operations. The essential issue for the IOC was to save human lives, to favour dialogue and to exert pressure on political leaders. From this point of view, the initiative was conclusive. Its objective was reached. This positive result provided encouragement to do more to foster peace in the world. In countries confronted with political, economic and social problems, the IOC's peace initiative was perceived as an act of solidarity by the national sports movements. It is undoubtedly in such gestures of goodwill and solidarity - a willingness

to listen to those who are in need of help and comfort, far from the television cameras - that one finds the greatness of the Olympic Movement.

In 1995, the year of its fiftieth anniversary? the United Nations General Assembly was addressed by President Samaranch and adopted once again a resolution with the record number of 161 co-sponsors calling for the observance of the Olympic Truce during the Games of the XXVI Olympiad, the Centennial Games, in Atlanta in 1996. The resolution also invited the General Assembly to consider, one year before the holding of each Olympic Games, an item entitled "Building a better and peaceful world through sport and the Olympic ideal". It is in this framework that the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution co-sponsored by 178 Member States, an absolute record in the history of the United Nations, in New York on 25 November 1997, inviting the Member States to observe, individually and collectively, the Olympic Truce from 7 to 22 February 1998 during the XVIII Olympic Winter Games to be held in Nagano, Japan, and to seek in conformity with the purpose and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the peaceful settlement of all international conflicts. The draft resolution was presented by the Japanese Olympic medallist Mikako Kitani, who is also a member of the IOC Athletes' Commission and of the Coordination Commission for the Olympic Games in Nagano.

This new chapter in the history of Olympism gives practical expression to the fundamental principles of the *Olympic Charter* relative to building a peaceful and better world, which have taken time to translate into concrete actions. Sport can indeed serve diplomacy? and, inversely, diplomacy can serve sport. Yet, in the final analysis, everything depends on what women and men do - for better or for worse.



Penny Wensley, ambassador and permanent representative of Australia to the United Nations.



Resolution

“Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal”

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution A/50/L.15 of 7 November 1995 deciding to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-second session an item entitled “Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal” and to consider this item every two years in advance of each Summer and Winter Olympic Games;

Recalling also its resolution 48/11 of 25 October 1993, which *inter alia*, revived the ancient Greek tradition of *Ekecheiria* or “Olympic Truce”, calling for all hostilities to cease during the Games, thereby mobilizing the youth of the world in the cause of peace;

Recognizing the valuable contribution that the appeal launched by the International Olympic Committee for an Olympic Truce, with which the National Olympic Committees of the Member States are associated, could make towards advancing the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Taking into account resolution CM/RES.28 (LXII), adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity at its sixty-second ordinary session, held at Addis Ababa from 21 to 23 June 1995 and endorsed by the Assembly of Heads of State and governments of that organization which supports the appeal for an Olympic Truce;

Reaffirming that the Olympic Ideal promotes international understanding particularly among the youth of the world, through sport and culture in order to advance the harmonious development of humankind;

Noting with satisfaction the increasing number of joint endeavours of the International Olympic Committee and the United Nations system, for instance in the fields of development, humanitarian assistance, protection of the environment, health promotion, and education, in which the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the

United Nations Environment Programme, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization have participated;

1. **Urges** the Member States to observe the Olympic Truce during the XVIII Olympic Winter Games, which will be held in Nagano (Japan) from 7 to 22 February 1998, the vision of which is to be a link to the 21st century, inspiring the search for wisdom for the new era, respect for the beauty and bounty of nature, and the furtherance of peace and goodwill.

2. **Takes note** of the idea of “Olympic Truce”, as dedicated in ancient Greece to the spirit of fraternity and understanding between peoples, and urges the Member States to take the initiative to abide by the Truce, individually and collectively, and to pursue in conformity with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations the peaceful settlement of all international conflicts;

3. **Calls upon** all Member States to cooperate with the International Olympic Committee in its efforts to promote the Olympic Truce;

4. **Requests** that the Secretary-General promote the observance of the Olympic Truce among Member States, drawing the attention of world public opinion to the contribution such a truce would make to the promotion of international understanding and the fostering of peace and goodwill, and to cooperate with the International Olympic Committee in the realization of this objective;

5. **Welcomes** the decision of the International Olympic Committee to fly the United Nations flag at all competition sites of the Olympic Games;

6. **Decides** to include in the agenda of its fifty-fourth session an item entitled “Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal” and to consider this item before the Games of the XXVII Olympiad in Sydney (Australia) in the year 2000.

Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Comores, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon,

Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran (Islamic Republic), Ireland, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakstan, Kenya, Korea, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Morocco, Mauritius, Mauritania, Mexico, Micronesia (Federated States), Monaco, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Pak-

istan, Palau, People's Democratic Republic of Korea, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Rumania, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Salomon Islands, Samoa, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Surinam, Swaziland, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.