

# Olympism

## Opinion

by Fékrou Kidane

**Y**ou are certainly aware of the crisis that the International Olympic Committee is currently facing.

The disclosure to the media of a forged, unsigned letter by someone seeking to settle a score with leaders of the organizing committee of the XIX Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City in 2002 (SLOC), sparked off a disproportionate campaign against the International Olympic Committee.

This forged letter, which never was sent by SLOC, concerned the payment of a scholarship at an American university to the daughter of an IOC member, who died last August.

Subsequent allegations surrounding the selection of Salt Lake City as the city to host the Olympic Games blew up a storm, which continues to rage through the media. Even before the results of the inquiries were published, accusations were levelled without any thought to such fundamental rights as the presumption of innocence and the right to a hearing. Scores will continue to be settled at all levels, and for a long time, because ill-intentioned people can always be found to feed the press.

What is regrettable is the slur being cast upon the IOC members in general - including those whose integrity and behaviour are beyond reproach - by various persons. These disclosures, which to some smack of "conspiracy" and "influence-peddling", have deeply saddened all those who have devoted their lives to promoting the Olympic ideal. Scandal has become a part of our daily fare; it is a popular dish that can be enjoyed at any time. In these circumstances, anyone who has a score to settle, whether out of mean-spiritedness, rancour, jealousy, hatred or racism, can indulge. Tolerance, respect for others, fair play and human rights lose all meaning.

Unfortunately, our society is faced with the use of reprehensible methods that poison human relations. Corruption is

## Open letter to a friend

used to obtain information, market shares, services, and to defend national, commercial and political interests. There is no lack of examples, both in the public and in the private sectors. Some sin out of ignorance and naïveté, negligence or poverty; others sin out of self-interest, fully aware of what they are doing. Very little is said of those who do the corrupting. The first to take an interest in them was the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which called the IOC a victim of corrupters. Whatever the reasons, elementary rules require that everyone respect the laws that govern our actions within the community. For members of the Olympic family, and for the IOC members in particular, this means observing the *Olympic Charter*, to which they all adhere of their own free will.

President Samaranch did not hesitate to take the necessary measures to clarify the Salt Lake City case. In a statement made to the press after the release of the report by the ad hoc commission on Salt Lake City, the IOC President said, "I am sincerely disappointed that IOC members were involved in the events revealed in this investigation and deeply saddened by their conduct. [...] We are resolute in our determination to root out the improprieties and to ensure that this never occurs again. [...] We will do whatever is necessary to protect the integrity and ideals of the Olympic Games, and to restore the people's faith in the Olympic Movement."

While presenting the report of the ad hoc inquiry commission which he pre-

sides, Richard Pound said among other things that, "I would also like to make it clear that we are not accusing any member of corruption or bribery. Nor are we suggesting that there was criminal conduct in these circumstances. These individuals are guilty of breaking the oath they took when they were inducted as members of the IOC and for bringing the reputation of the IOC into disrepute. Finally, let me also say that this is not an issue of geography, culture, or race and should not be perceived that way. It is a matter of individual conduct in an organization that places the highest importance on its members' personal integrity."

Despite what its detractors say, the Olympic Movement, led by millions of volunteers around the world, whose image people are seeking to tarnish with accusations of corruption - if, indeed, there was corruption - is a movement which is alive and characterized by responsibility and integrity, compared with the scandals that have smeared political and economic circles. The Olympic Movement strives toward the development of sport and the well-being of youth, although some have tried to claim that Olympic Solidarity's aid to developing countries, and particularly to the most disadvantaged, only exists in fiction. In order to be convinced that the contrary is true, one has simply to go into the field and see the benefits in these countries of this assistance, which helps to preserve the universality of the Olympic Games.

Alas, everything that is positive does not interest the press. As the saying

goes, "Good news is no news". In defiance of the absurd and insulting comments and demands for resignation made by people who have absolutely nothing to do with the Olympic Movement, or by opportunists, Samaranch will remain at the helm to continue his work of modernization. Only the IOC Session, which includes all the IOC members, can pass a vote of "no confidence", not these self-styled moral arbiters. The founder of the IOC, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, said "while there were blows to be taken - and to strike - I

remained joyfully at the post in which the continuing unanimity of your votes kept me." Samaranch can say the same.

But in the end, who are these people who have distinguished themselves through their arrogance, their aggressiveness and their misunderstanding of the facts, and who claim to uphold "moral values" of which they themselves do not know the meaning? Nevertheless, I am convinced that the IOC will come out of this crisis and take all the necessary measures to correct the weaknesses in its different

structures. You know that the IOC, which is in its 105<sup>th</sup> year of existence, has never suspended its activities except during the First and Second World Wars.

The IOC will continue its fight against doping in sport by creating an anti-doping Agency, and its fight against under-development by increasing its actions of Olympic solidarity to the benefit of the most disadvantaged countries, and by cooperating closely with the Organizing Committees, in order to ensure the success of the Olympic Games of the next millennium.

## News flash

### Israel

The 1998 annual session of the National Olympic Academy of Israel was held in the city of Eilat. Nahum Rogel, who was part of the Israeli Olympic team to the Games of the XXV and XXVI Olympiads in Barcelona and Atlanta in

1992 and 1996, respectively, and who is now training in preparation for the Games of the XXVII Olympiad in Sydney in 2000, was the keynote speaker. The session was attended by many young people, who enjoyed this opportunity to meet an Olympic athlete.



A young participant receives a certificate of participation from Gabi Kadosh, mayor of Eilat. Zvi Varshaviak, NOC president, is pictured left.

### Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The NOC president Vasil Tupurkovski recently presented the 1998 IOC Sports Ethics Trophy to sports medicine specialist Milos

Vucidolov, and the 1997 IOC Sport for All Trophy to Sokrat Eftimovski, a physical education teacher.



(From left to right) Sokrat Eftimovski, Vasil Tupurkovski and Milos Vucidolov