



## Open letter to a friend

by Fékrou Kidane

The storm that has shaken the IOC has changed speed and direction. The skies are clearing. Everyone is now assessing the damage and planning changes.

For my part, I delved back into the sources of Olympism, to refresh my memory of the teachings of Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the IOC leisure, who revived the Olympic Games.

Moving from Olympism to the gospels, Coubertin said : "The Bible orders us to 'Love thy neighbour as thyself', teaching the way of salvation. Rejoice in ever-reborn humanity, advises Olympism. Have faith in it, pour your strength into it, join your hopes with the hopes of Olympism. Egotistical joy is only an intermittent sun. Altruistic joy is a perpetual halo."

I, like you, have faith in Olympism, and that is the reason I work for the IOC. If not... Olympism : here is a word, a concept, that has disappeared from our vocabulary or become obsolete. As we approach the end of the century, the modern language refers to business and economics. Yet, without Olympism, without its fundamental principles, the IOC and the Olympic Games would be obsolete. Coubertin said : "Olympism is by no means a victim of the catastrophe. It has come through fearlessly and without reproach; the suddenly wider horizons opening up before it bear witness to the importance of the new role that awaits, Olympism is the cult of youth, with its new-found serenity and confidence. Serenity and confidence were becoming increasingly useful auxiliaries for the old civilization of tomor-

row which will be born amid the storm. Serenity and confidence are not our natural companions. From the cradle, human beings know fear; throughout our lives, fear is just around the corner; as we approach the grave, fear endeavours to lay us low. Faced with this enemy, so skilled in disturbing our work and our mankind has armed himself with courage, the noble virtue some believed to be the apanage of their ancestors alone, thinking that present generations had let its flower perish between their fingers; we now know where we stand on this point." Once upon a time, there were National Olympic Committees that had no sponsors, that answered to no one but the IOC, that took lessons from no one, and whose athletes took part in the Olympic Games with the support of governments and benefactors. Their aim was to uphold the Olympic ideal and to celebrate together the quadrennial festival of the youth of the world, under the auspices of the IOC. It was a time when every country paid its own way without any problem. It was a time when the organizing committees negotiated preferential prices for accommodation and various other services, for everyone, including journalists. Alas, times have changed. An excessive commercialization of sport has changed the landscape of world sport. Little is said of sport itself. More is said of revenue, rights, percentages and financial performance. Money! This is the heart of the matter, and the source of all misfortunes as well as of all fortunes.

The fact that the Olympic Movement is financially independent, and that it reinvests its resources in the development of sport, is a major advantage. But on one condition, as the IOC President points out : "Sport - not commercial interests - must control its own destiny". These past months, we have heard and read all sorts of comments and arguments about the IOC's inability to manage its own fate. Moralizers were numerous and claimed that the IOC would explode or disappear if it were abandoned by its financial partners. Are they joking? "The modern Olympiads", said Coubertin, "mobilize too many activities that are unrelated to sport, too many extraneous ambitions; people come to the Games to parade some scrap of ribbon, or use the Games to further their personal, electoral or other ambitions." Some have forgotten that the IOC existed without a bank account, with very few resources, that IOC members covered their own expenses, and even paid a membership fee and took out a paid subscription to the Olympic Review. In the worst case scenario, for the sake of independence and in order not to be at anyone's mercy, we could return to our beginnings. The NOCs and organizing cities would get by, as they did in the past. One should not underestimate the silent mass that is the very foundation of the Olympic Movement, and which is capable of defending sport. The proof is that sports competitions take place all year round with millions of participants. Developing countries participate in continental games and championships using their own

resources. There is therefore no reason why they should not do the same for the Olympic Games. When I was responsible for my NOC in the '60s and '70s there was no external financial support, but this did not prevent us from winning medals at every Olympic Games, as we continue to do today. Of course, it has not come to this, although echoes of various attempts at blackmail by publicity-hungry people do reach us from time to time.

"Any institution, any creation, however alive it may be", said Coubertin, "develops according to the customs and the passions of the moment. Today, politics infiltrates to the heart of all problems. How can sport, 'muscu-

larism', Olympism itself, escape? But the ravages it can cause are only on the surface. In reality, institutions almost always undergo two types of development : that of the outward appearance and that of the soul. The first tries to espouse the forms of fashion, and changes according to fashion's whims; the second remains as constant as the principles on which the institution rests; it evolves slowly and healthily, in accordance with human laws themselves. Olympism belongs to this latter category."

The IOC President has already taken the necessary measures to ensure that reforms will be under way by the end of this year, and that "IOC 2000" reflects the hopes and expectations of

all its members, to ensure that the Olympic ideal can continue to serve the building of a peaceful and better world in the third millennium. Coubertin said, "I did not place the effective management of revived Olympism in the hands of my successor until I considered the work of revival to be completely in order, including the most minor details, answering current needs, but nevertheless in accordance with the memories and lessons of the past, and until universal acceptance had guaranteed its survival." This is the legitimate and well-founded aspiration of Juan Antonio Samaranch, as was the case for his predecessor, Pierre de Coubertin. The rest is fiction.

## Development

### National forums

In the framework of the International Olympic Forum for Development (IOFD), two national forums were organized last March in Madagascar and Mauritius. At Antananarivo, the minister Mamy Ratomalala, representing the Prime Minister, officially opened the Forum, which was attended by the minister for Youth and Sport, Corvette Ndrinasolo, the president of the Madagascar NOC, Roger Henri and a number of representatives of the Madagascar political and sports world. At the end of two days of discussions, the recommendations

which were adopted by the 120 or so participants included organizing an annual symposium, setting up a national coordination structure for international aid and a centre of excellence in each province, the creation of a documentation centre on Madagascan sport and, above all, the reconsideration of physical and sports activities as educational disciplines in their own right in support projects for educational systems

The second forum took place at Port-Louis in the presence of the Mauritian minister for Youth and Sport, Marie-Claude Arouff-Parfait, the IOC member

Ram Ruhee and the president of the Mauritian NOC, Chintaman Rambocus. Some 50 people took part. The issues which were discussed included not only the Olympic Movement in Mauritius, the organization of African sport and the problem of funding sport

and the development of sport, but also the importance of school sport, women in sport, and training and using sports managers.

These two forums were coordinated by Fékrou Kidane, executive secretary of the IOFD.



*The participants in Mauritius.*