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Women and Sport

The year 2000 marks the centenary of the first women participation at the Games of the II Olympiad in Paris in 1900. Since then, women have had to wage a fierce struggle to secure respect for their right to practise the sport of their choice. Over time, attitudes towards women have changed enormously, with significant progress made within the Olympic Movement. When I became IOC President in 1980, one of my priorities was to have women elected as members of the International Olympic Committee for the first time in Olympic history. This objective was attained in 1981. Today, the IOC has several women within its structures, and one of them, Anita DeFrantz, holds the post of vice-president and also chairs the Working Group on Women and Sport.

The IOC has also been involved in one way or another in the initiatives undertaken around the world to promote women in sport. Thus, in 1995 the IOC called on the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and International Federations (IFs) to elect women within their various bodies to secure 10% representation before the end of this year, and at least 20% by 2005. Around one hundred NOCs and more than 20 IFs have already taken the necessary measures. We hope that the remainder will soon do the same. But the challenge will still remain until women hold positions of responsibility at all levels of national, regional and international sports leadership. The challenge will remain until girls have the same chance to practise sport as boys. The challenge will also remain for as long as barriers of culture and tradition prevent girls and women in some countries from benefiting from physical and sports activities for their well-being.

The Second IOC World Conference on Women and Sport, which will take place in Paris from 6 to 8 March, will certainly examine the current situation and make proposals for the future.

The 21st century looks promising in terms of promoting women in sport. Already in Sydney, at the Games of the XXVII Olympiad, women will compete in 25 sports, accounting for an estimated 38% of the participants. For many years, any new sport on the Olympic programme has had to include women's events.

The number of national, regional and international championships for women in all sports is increasing. The tennis tournaments are a good illustration of the progress made in this area. For its part, the Olympic Movement is in all cases determined to make a concrete contribution, so that this new century will mark the start of a new era for women in modern sport.

