

THE CHALLENGES TO BE TAKEN UP

When I became IOC President in 1980, one of my priorities was for the first time in history to have women elected to the international Olympic Committee. This objective was reached in 1981 at the first IOC Session that I presided.

At present there are 14 active women members, and one of whom, Anita DeFrantz, is IOC Vice-President and also chairs the "Women and Sport" working group.

The three most recently elected as members, Charmaine Crooks, Manuela Di Centa and Hassiba Boulmerka, represent the athletes. They were elected firstly by their peers at the Olympic Village during the Olympic Games to represent them within the IOC Athletes' Commission. Their election as IOC members was possible thanks to the reforms which the IOC has just adopted following the crisis it experienced.

In one way or another, the IOC has been involved in the initiatives undertaken around the world, and has created within its administration a section devoted to the promotion of women and sport.

In 1995, the National Olympic Committees (NOC) and the International Federations (IF) were called upon to elect women to their various bodies to reach 10% representation by the end of this year, and at least 20% by 2005. Around 100 NOCs and more than 20 IFs have already taken the necessary measures. The two women IF presidents, Shengrong Lu (badminton) and The Infanta Doña Pilar de Borbon (equestrian sports), are also IOC members. We hope that the IFs and NOCs missing from this list will not be slow to follow suit.

Many NOCs have also created "women and sport" commissions within their structures.

by Juan Antonio Samaranch*

Olympic Solidarity has also sought to encourage the presence of women participants in the various courses it organizes in cooperation with the National Olympic Committees.

To date, we have organized "women and sport" seminars on every continent, and support the NOCs to do the same at national level.

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 opportunity to practise sport as boys.

The challenge will also remain 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.

We must however lend our support to women in developing countries, where the low level of sports participation is fundamentally linked to social difficulties, in a thought-out, appropriate and mutually respectful way.

The problems which face women do not only concern the sports movement, but involve all areas of life within society. Even now in New York, the political authorities are in the process of analysing the results of the Beijing Conference on women under the aegis of the United Nations. A few months ago, the French parliament set an example by passing a law on parity between women and men in political circles.

It is also up to governments to define a policy which takes into account the need to make sport more accessible to women, and to increase the budget allocated to the development of women's sport.

Nevertheless, the 21st century looks promising for the promotion of women in sport. For many years, any new sport on the Olympic programme has had to include women's events.

Already in Sydney, Australia, at the Games of the XXVII Olympiad, women will compete in 25 of the 28 sports, accounting for an estimated 38% of the participants. Beside softball, artistic gymnastics and synchronized swimming are exclusively for women. On the programme of the XIX Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City, United States of America, in 2002, 45.6% of the events will be women, almost on a par with the men.

The number of national, regional and world championships for women in all sports is increasing. The tennis tournaments are a good illustration of the progress made in this area.

The significant results obtained so far thanks to the action which you have all undertaken, in particular women's non-governmental organizations and the Olympic Movement, have required long, hard work. We can only succeed step by step, using the strength of persuasion and dialogue and taking account of the cultural diversity of our society.

The efforts made by the IOC during the last four years to promote women in sport are far from negligible. The results obtained are encouraging. We shall strive to do even better in order that women occupy the position they deserve within the Olympic Movement.

In all cases, the IOC is determined to make a concrete contribution so that this new century will mark the start of a new era for women and sport with a better representation in sport administration and a parity in the Olympic Games programme.

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