

# The Birth of the Modern 'Olympic Truce:' The Chronological Approach

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*The IOC claims that it started the modern "Olympic Truce" project in 1991 for the first time, according to a document (fact sheet) found on the IOC website. However, there is a page called "Ekeckeiria" in the official report of the 1952 Helsinki Games, where the organizing committee had the resolution of the "Olympic Truce" for the first time. It can be said that this is the birth of the modern "Olympic Truce" by an OCOG. At the 60th Anniversary of the IOC in Athens, (the 49<sup>th</sup> Session of the IOC in 1954) the president Brundage mentioned the "Olympic Truce." Furthermore, in 1956 the IOC decided to appeal for the modern "Olympic Truce" for the first time, so that Hungarian athletes could participate in the Melbourne Games after the former Soviet Union invaded and attacked Hungary. It could be said that this appeal is the birth date of the modern "Olympic Truce" by the IOC. In 1992, the IOC launched an appeal for the observance of the modern "Olympic Truce." According to this appeal, the athletes of the former Yugoslavia could participate in the 1992 Barcelona Games as the Independent Olympic Athletes (IOA). In 1993 the UN adapted its first resolution on the observance of the modern "Olympic Truce" at the 48th session of the UN General Assembly. Since then, the UN General Assembly has adapted the resolution every two years, a year in advance of each Olympic Games. This was the beginning of the joint "Olympic Truce" activities between the UN and IOC.*



## Introduction

The IOC claims that it started the modern "Olympic Truce" project in 1991 for the first time, according to a document (fact sheet) on the website of the IOC.<sup>1</sup> This fact sheet shows that the IOC and UN negotiated for the athletes of the former Republic of Yugoslavia to join the 1992 Barcelona Games as Independent Olympic Athletes (IOA). The IOC approached the UN, because the Security Council of the United Nations had included sports meetings amongst its list of sanctions following the former Yugoslavia's break-up (Resolution 757).<sup>2</sup> Afterwards, an "Appeal for the Olympic Truce" was adopted at the 99<sup>th</sup> IOC Session in July, 1992.<sup>3</sup> The following year, the "Olympics Truce resolution" was adopted at the United Nations General Assembly. Since 1993, the UN General Assembly has continued to adopt Olympic truce resolutions every two years (in those years preceding the Winter or Summer Olympic Games).<sup>4</sup> Following this IOC standpoint, studies that assume the inception of the modern "Olympics truce" was in 1992 have appeared.<sup>5</sup>

In this way, it has been argued that the start of the history of the modern "Olympic Truce" appeal by the IOC was in 1992. However, it seems unlikely that there was no history of such an "Olympic Truce" appeal in an earlier age. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the birth of the

peaceful thought and action called the modern “Olympic Truce.” In other words, the main concern of this study is to clarify the first appearance of the modern “Olympic Truce” during the revival of the modern Olympic era, and to discuss what kind of meaning this concept still has today.

First, it is important to investigate the writings of Coubertin, as well as the 1948 Olympic Games after World War II, and then to confirm the handling of this peaceful thought at that time. Then, this research proceeds to clarify how this concept was treated under the Cold War structure. Third, the investigation of the situation of the IOC’s modern “Olympic Truce” appeal of 1990’s will follow. Finally, the significance of this concept in the present 21<sup>st</sup> century is discussed.

### **“Olympic Truce” as Referred to by de Coubertin**

In 1935, when Pierre de Coubertin gave a radio address called the “The philosophic foundation of modern Olympism”, he talked about “the Truce” of modern times.<sup>6</sup> When he referred to “the Sacred Truce” of the ancient Greece in other documents, it was connected with the significance of the revival of the Olympics and the peaceful desires of the modern era.<sup>7</sup> In this radio address, reflecting the political situation in that day, he stated that nationalism should be abandoned or put “on temporary leave.” Moreover, he said that the truce was another element of Olympism. Unfortunately, however, he did not call for the modern “Olympic Truce” in the face of wartime.

### **After World War II: “Olympic Truce” Under the Cold War**

After World War II, for the first Games in London 1948, as the Japanese and German teams were forbidden to join the Games because of their roles in the Second World War, the 1948 London Games had a shadow of the struggles of the War. The official report of the 1948 London Games contains no reference to the “Olympic Truce” after World War II. Although the report stated that these Games hoped for a peaceful postwar world, the report included just eight words of “peace.”<sup>8</sup> However, the picture of the ‘V character’ signature and the following narration are included in the IOC’s official Olympic film of the London Games in 1948. “V for victory, not in war, not in wealth, but in sportsmanship and in peace.”<sup>9</sup>

In addition, although the word called “Olympics Truce” is not seen in the official report of the 1948 London Games, a very interesting and important message for peace was given to describe the start of the 1948 Torch Relay at Ancient Olympia.

*The first runner, Corporal Dimitrelis of the Greek Army, stepped forward, clad in uniform with his rifle in his hand. Laying down his arms and taking off his uniform, he appeared clad as an athlete and thus, having symbolized the tradition that war ceased during the period of the ancient Games, he lit his torch and set off on the first stage of the Relay.*<sup>10</sup>

Following the second Games after the World War II a page called “Ekekheiria” appeared in the official report of the 1952 Helsinki Games. Here, the organizing committee of the Helsinki Games proclaimed an “Olympic Truce” for the first time.<sup>11</sup> It can be said that this is the birth of the modern “Olympic Truce” by an Organising Committee. Soon after, at the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the IOC in Athens (the 49<sup>th</sup> Session of the IOC in 1954), the president, Avery Brundage, mentioned the “Olympic Truce.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in 1956 the IOC decided to appeal for the modern “Olympic Truce” for the first time, so that Hungarian athletes could participate in the Melbourne Games following the Soviet Union’s invasion and attack on Hungary in 1956. Hungarian athletes could move from Budapest to Prague at that time, and they could fly by air to Melbourne.<sup>13</sup> Hence, it may be said that this appeal is the signaled the birth of the modern “Olympic Truce” by the IOC.

This was the era of the 'Cold War' between the East and the West blocs. In this sense, the attitudes of both the IOC and OCOG to ask for peace through the Olympics should be estimated positively, as there was the Korean Civil War, the disturbance in Suez, and the Hungarian uprising in that time of great tension between the U.S. and Russia.

After that, in 1980, the Western bloc, led by the USA, boycotted the 1980 Moscow Games in protest of the Soviet's invasion of Afghanistan. In return, the East bloc boycotted the 1984 Los Angeles Games, and the Cold War between the East and the West structures were strengthened in the early 1980s. Despite this politicization of the Games, there were no references to an "Olympic Truce" in the official Olympic Games report at that time.

### **"Olympic Truce" Motion by the IOC in 1992**

As shown on the IOC's website and fact sheet, in the 1990s IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch appealed for the reintroduction of the modern "Olympic Truce." As the result of a series of negotiations with the United Nations at the collapse of former Republic of Yugoslavia,<sup>14</sup> the IOC launched an appeal for the observance of the modern "Olympic Truce."<sup>15</sup> Connected to this appeal, the athletes of the former Yugoslavia could participate in the 1992 Barcelona Games as the Independent Olympic Athletes (IOA).

In 1993 the UN adapted its first resolution on the observance of the modern "Olympic Truce" at the 48th session of the UN General Assembly.<sup>16</sup> Since then, the UN General Assembly has adopted a "Truce" resolution every two years, that is, one year in advance of each successive Olympic Games. Since 1993, UN General Assembly resolutions have been adopted as follows:

1993: Resolution for the 1994 Lillehammer Winter Games <sup>17</sup>	1995: Resolution for the 1996 Atlanta Games <sup>18</sup>
1997: Resolution for the 1998 Nagano Winter Games <sup>19</sup>	1999: Resolution for the 2000 Sydney Games <sup>20</sup>
2001: Resolution for the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Games <sup>21</sup>	2003: Resolution for the 2004 Athens Games <sup>22</sup>
2005: Resolution for the 2006 Turin Winter Games <sup>23</sup>	2007: Resolution for the 2008 Beijing Games <sup>24</sup>

Among these United Nations General Assembly resolutions, the resolution that had an effective impact upon war and world conflicts was the one connected to the Nagano Winter Games in 1997, and U.S. forces delayed attacks on Iraq during its operations in that country at the time of the 1998 Nagano Games. Unfortunately, however, an effective "Olympic Truce" has not been realized by this United Nation resolution.

### **The Establishment and the Activities of the International Olympic Truce Center**

The International Olympics Truce Foundation (IOTF) and the International Olympic Truce Center (IOTC) which the IOC established in July 2000 contributed significantly to the Athens Games in 2004.<sup>25</sup> The IOTF cooperated with UNESCO and published a comic book called "Truce Story" for the children of the world in 2004.<sup>26</sup> It was translated into 7 languages and was distributed to 50 countries worldwide. Though the Japanese Olympic Academy made attempts to translate it in Japan, unfortunately this did not happen. It may be said that this case was one of the good examples to show where the main interest of the Japanese towards the Olympics lies. There is no Japanese edition of the comic book "Truce Story."

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, Mr. Papandreou, who was vice-chairperson of the IOTF in those days, appealed for the "Olympic Truce" resolution for the 2004 Athens Games at the United Nations General Assembly on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003.<sup>27</sup> One part of his speech has a sentence: "If we could have peace for 16 days, maybe, just maybe, we can have it forever."<sup>28</sup> This became the slogan of the IOTC. This truce resolution was adopted by 190 countries out of the United Nations member-

ship of 191 countries. Though Iraq is a member of the United Nations, they could not send a delegation to vote under wartime conditions. As to Japan, the USA and the U.K., though they fought in Iraq, they all agreed to this resolution, too. Unfortunately, since the United Nations began adopting resolutions for these "Olympic Truces" in 1993, they have not been completely observed once.

As you know, in 2004, various "Olympic Truce" activities were developed for the Athens Games, including the opening ceremony of the Athens Games on August 13th. Indeed, President Rogge of the IOC mentioned "Olympic Truce" in his greetings at the opening ceremony. However, 70,000 security guards were posted in the venue site inside and outside of the opening ceremony, and the total cost for the security for the Athens Games was more than 1,200,000,000 Euros. At the opening ceremony, the Iraqi delegation received an ardent welcome, but the "Olympic Truce" of 2004 was not realized in Iraq.

The IOTC had a ceremony for signature of the "Olympic Truce" in the Zappeion on the next day following the opening ceremony. In this ceremony, British Prime Minister Blair, President Köhler of Germany, and other international leaders and the imperial families of Middle East countries signed the document.<sup>29</sup> The American ex-President George Bush was invited, too, but he declined a signature.

### **Concluding Remarks**

"The Sacred Truce" of ancient Olympia was not expressed by de Coubertin in the modern era, who was an advocator of the peace movement through the Olympic movement. There was no declaration of the modern "Olympic Truce" during the two World Wars, and the Olympic Games were driven to cancellation three times because of these Wars. The introduction of the idea of the modern "Olympic Truce" after World War II depended on the desires to attain a peaceful world under the Cold War atmosphere between the East and the West blocs led by the USA and the Soviet Union. The modern "Olympic Truce" was introduced again in the face of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the 1990's reorganization of the Eastern Europe area, and had some effect in its own way in those days. However, even if these modern "Olympic Truces" may be decided in the United Nations every two years, unfortunately, never do conflicts or wars in the world disappear perfectly during the Olympic Games. In addition, it can be said that the meaning of the modern "Olympic Truce" resolution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century seems to be changed under the world politics in these days. As to the recent dispute or conflict, they are caused not by the fight for hegemony by large countries, but by the things which are connected more closely to ethnic minorities and religious oppositions. The modern "Olympic Truce" resolution by the United Nations which may be a kind of big apparatus cannot have strong power under such situations. While it is recognized that the ideal of the modern "Olympic Truce" is important, it could not have a real effect. Perhaps a method by which the modern "Olympic Truce" could come to have a real effect as the part of Olympic movement would be through an idea called Olympism.

On October 31, 2007, the United Nations unanimously adopted the "Olympic Truce Resolution" for the 2008 Beijing Games.<sup>30</sup> China and both the Japanese and U.S. governments approved of it, too. However, it may be argued that the current disturbance surrounding the International Torch Relay and the boycott movement of the opening ceremony is against the spirit of the "Olympic Truce." Not to let a "Truce" resolution lack in substance, following a message of historical fact: persons known as 'spondophoroi' called for the truce to be observed at the athletic competitions at ancient Olympia. Perhaps modern 'spondophoroi' are needed to encourage nations to observe the "Olympic Truce," particularly since the International Olympic Torch Relay always begins at ancient Olympia. These more positive and strong reformation ideas for the "Olympic Truce" may make the appeal for the more peaceful world more of a possibility.

## Endnotes

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- 6 Norbert Müller, ed., *Olympism: Selected Writings— Pierre de Coubertin* (Lausanne: IOC, 2000), 580-583.
- 7 For example, see Müller, *Olympism*, 251, 295, 565, and 577.
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- 14 UN, Security Council Resolution, no. 757.
- 15 IOC, *Olympic Review* 299, Sept (1992): 429.
- 16 IOC, "Olympic Truce."
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