

ADDRESS AT THE OPENING OF THE SESSION

By Mr EPAM. PETRALIAS

President of the I.O.A.



Ladies and Gentlemen,

We feel particularly happy and pleased to be able to welcome you here, in the seat of the International Olympic Academy, in order to open the proceedings of a new session, the twelfth.

I thought it would be opportune to outline for you the role of the International Olympic Academy, its aims and pursuits. I will limit myself to some general statements because the various distinguished lecturers who will take the floor after me, will present the aims, pursuits and teachings of the I.O.A. in a more detailed way. I will give you an outline.

The task of the International Olympic Academy is the development and propagation of Olympic ideals as these have been handed down to us by our ancestors and conceived by Pierre de Coubertin.

Coubertin had expressed, at an early stage, his opinion on the need of establishing and running a research centre for sports where would be studied and discussed not only the technical aspects of sport, but also its philosophy, moral principles, social influence, its future evolution, its contribution to a better understanding between peoples and the creation of international friendship and mutual respect.

There exists a specific and historically proven precedent. The races which, in ancient times, had spread over the Mediterranean coasts were of course of Greek origin, but formed independent States, cities or regimes. And nevertheless, thanks to the spiritual power of sports the small states united and became Greece, Ancient Greece.

Unification was achieved through the spiritual power of sports which were born in the core of the antique world. Olympia. The independent Greek tribes, identified their dreams and pursuits, adored the same gods, cultivated their thoughts, philosophy and morals and fought together against the foreign invaders and thus Greece was established.

It is in this Greece of the Mediterranean, whose unification had been achieved in Olympia, during the Olympic Games held every four years, that the civilisation of the world developed and we can thus

affirm that the world owes its civilisation to sports and the Olympic idea. Coubertin believed that the moral principles of civilisation may be propagated to the benefit of the world and should be promoted through a joint effort, based on scientific and spiritual foundations. Coubertin himself organized three scientific congresses where pedagogics, hygiene, art, sciences and psychology through sports were discussed. He did not seem satisfied however, with the conclusions of these congresses and their impact. He was looking for a new body to propagate his ideas, a more stable one, which could be entrusted with the elaboration, the research and the presentation of basic topics related to sports because he had foreseen and was in favour of the necessary readaptation of sports, which, however, he wished to see carried out in a careful and studied way.

Coubertin was the first to conceive, in 1936, during the Games of Berlin, the idea of the founding of an international Olympic Institute, a centre of Olympic studies, where the subjects of world sports would be discussed, scientifically studied and taught.

It is from this idea of Coubertin that the International Olympic Academy has sprung, established later, after long research and cooperation of the late John Ketseas and Carl Diem.

Thus, John Ketseas, on the instructions of the Hellenic Olympic Committee, submitted a memorandum to the I.O.C. on the creation and operation of an International Olympic Academy, in Ancient Olympia.

The foundation of this institution was decided by the I.O.C. on 28 April 1949 during its Rome session and the Hellenic Olympic Committee's proposal was unanimously accepted. John Ketseas, thanking the I.O.C. members for their unanimous decision, said, amongst other things : «Greece, will do anything in its power, to ensure that this institution with the support of the I.O.C. and all National Committees, will bear fruitful results for sports and the Olympic ideals.»

In the realization of this aim, John Ketseas and the H.O.C. were greatly assisted by the German Carl Diem, then Director of the Higher Institute of Physical Education of Köln who was one of the founders of this Academy.

Greece can feel proud today because it has indeed done anything in its power in order to organize and consolidate this institution in the conscience of world sports.

The International Olympic Academy is consecrated to the Olympic movement and sports, and its task is to pave the way towards humanistic ideals which are enhanced through sports.

The main and fundamental aim of the I.O.A. is to strive for the

development and propagation but also for the preservation of the Olympic Idea and the supremacy of the pure principles of sports.

The aim of the I.O.A. is to prepare faithful and devoted preachers of the athletic idea, inspired believers in the true Olympic spirit. The main task of the I.O.A. is to find and educate the young which will continue this strenuous but noble effort which provides its followers with a simple, of no material value, but god-sent victory, in the strife towards virtue and beauty, in the struggle for friendship among nations and world peace.

You probably all wonder what the Olympic Idea is. I will therefore try to describe its context.

The Olympic Idea is a philosophy which, concurrently with the development of physical abilities, aims at the cultivation of intellectual pursuits with, as final objective, the harmonious development of men and his improvement. The Olympic Idea also aims at the education of the individuals and the masses, who will form physically and spiritually harmonious human types, so that the concept of «*Kalos Kagathos*» of the Ancient Greeks may be realized. It is thus apparent that the Olympic Idea fulfills clearly pedagogical and educational purposes and influences not only those participating in sports activities, but the innumerable friends of sports as well.

The Olympic Idea, from Coubertin's time, i.e. more than 75 years ago, until today, has gone through various evolution stages, following rapidly and constantly increasing technological progress and the many social changes, which have occurred as a result of two world wars. Nevertheless, the fundamental idea has remained unaltered and is based on the antique model.

The Olympic idea is closely connected to the Olympic Movement which is inseparably linked to the Olympic Games.

Let us examine what is contained in the concept of the Olympic Movement.

The Olympic Movement is the furthering of the evolution of the beautiful physical and moral properties which result from the contest of amateur athletes in friendly arenas and the gathering of the youth of the world in a great sports festival, celebrated every four years, through which international respect and goodwill are established and which contributes to the creation of a better and more peaceful world.

The Olympic Movement is infinitely continued, at all times. It is addressed to the whole world. It preaches the principles of the Olympic spirit to the men of every age, sex and class, in order to help them embrace its ideas, practise sports and become worthy and perfect citizens.

It has a public character, it includes all sports and participation in it is voluntary and aims at no material benefits. It is addressed to all nations and has no part in any political, religious, class or race distinctions. Its pursuits are purely pedagogical and based on the principle of honest amateurism, equality and justice. It strives in order to spread and develop the love for sports among the people and teach the young that participation in any sport is, above all, beneficial to themselves. The Olympic Movement is headed by amateur officials who contribute their work as idealists.

The Olympic Games are a universal quadrennial festival, whose main purpose is to draw the attention of the world to the Olympic Movement. While Ancient Games were always held in Olympia, the modern Games are transferred from continent to continent, from city to city, in order to attract followers from all corners of the world and spread the principles of the Olympic spirit.

The Modern *International Olympic Games* are the greatest social phenomenon of modern times because in their organization they include world society as a whole, without any discrimination, they cultivate the feeling of mutual recognition, cooperation and friendship between people, honest understanding and just and equal competition and they set a tangible example for human competition in other social fields. The Olympic Games favour individual effort and allow no discrimination between Nations, races, political systems and convictions, classes, financial situation and social development. Thus, they further international understanding, cultivate the spirit of true freedom in the young and create conditions of ideal social coexistence.

The Olympic Games should not be considered as an event during which only man's physical and muscular abilities are extolled. The Olympic Games are, fundamentally, a cultural event since no physical contest may be held without previous intensive and consecrated mental preparation. The prevalence of the spirit is evident during the whole of the athletic effort. Competition requires not only a perfect preparation but the general rounding of all the faculties of man ; physical, moral and intellectual. Thus the Games are essentially based on intellectual foundations since they require the contribution of the individual's mental and moral powers.

Only the elite from the various sports participates in the Games, where they compete with the same spirit and under the same rules. The programme of the Games is known and determined in advance and this international gathering has all the features of a great festival of world youth, with the grandiose ritual which contributes to the spiritual elevation of men. Parades, flags, multicoloured uniforms of men and

women athletes, magnificent installations, lights, the Olympic flame, music, enthusiasm and the incomparable joy of the crowd at the opening and closing ceremony and during the Games, all these festive elements develop universal friendship, goodwill between Nations, understanding, equality, mutual respect, fraternity between athletes and further world peace.

I have tried, as briefly as possible to present to you the aims of the International Olympic Academy and the spiritual principles on which they are based and which we shall try to convey to you, who are the Elite of the sportsloving youth of your country. Your country greatly depends on your cooperation in order to build a better tomorrow, which is your own aim and concern, but which it is our obligation, us older men, to help you build.

But let us now come back to the Academy. It is true that during the first years we had to face the hesitation, doubt and reserve of the National Olympic Committees. Now, however, we are happy to see that this hesitation has been erased and that the number of N.O.Cs sending representatives to the I.O.A's sessions is constantly increasing. The institution is fulfilling the hopes of its founders, it is imposed on the international level, consolidated, and the peace of Olympia and its lofty preaching attract more and more pilgrims of the Olympic Ideal. Those of you who have attended previous sessions of the I.O.A. will realize the truth of my statement.

The I.O.A. will be always attached to ethics, i.e. the ethical rules which through physical education give its true meaning to life. This means that the I.O.A. will always strive for a better humanity and an honest and happy world, competing only in the field of sports.

Gentlemen,

I wish that the work of the 12th Session be crowned with success to the glory of sports and hope that Olympia will inspire you with its pure and unsullied ideals, so that you can become the ardent preachers of these ideals, when you return to your countries.