

INTRODUCTORY TALK AT THE OPENING OF THE SESSION

By Mr. EPAM. PETRALIAS (Greece)

President of the I.O.A.



Ladies and Gentlemen,

We feel particularly happy and pleased to be able to welcome you here, in the headquarters of the International Olympic Academy, in order to open the proceedings of a new session, the 13th.

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 simply 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 center for sports where could 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, have 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 in Olympia through the spiritual power of sports.

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 sports could be propagated to the profit of the whole world and that they should be promoted by a joint effort based on scientific and cultural foundations.

Coubertin was seeking a new means for the propagation of his ideas, a permanent organisation whose mission would be to examine, to codify and to teach the major principles of Olympism with their social, cultural, pedagogical and philosophical implications.

During the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, he had conceived the creation of an international Olympic institute which would promote his ideas and teach the principles of his philosophy. The International Olympic Academy has been created on the basis of this wish thanks to the thoughts, the collaboration and the action of John Ketseas and Carl Diem.

Thus, John Ketseas, with the approval 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 approval 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 moral support of the I.O.C. and all National Olympic 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 the practice of sports.

The main and fundamental aim of the I.O.A. is to strive in close cooperation with the I.O.C., the N.O.Cs,' International Sports Federations and the cultural institutions of the world, for the development and propagation but also 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 who will continue this strenuous but noble effort which provides its followers with a simple victory, with no material value, and a factor of world peace.

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

The Olympic Idea is an original philosophy which, concurrently with the development of physical abilities, aims at the cultivation of intellectual pursuits, with, as final objective, the harmonious development of man 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 Ancient Greeks may be realized.

The Olympic Idea, from Coubertin's time, i.e. more than 75 years ago, until today, has gone through various evolution stages, following the 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 glorification of physical and moral qualities which result from sports games, the games which gather every four years, the sports youth of the world and which create mutual respect and international friendship aiming at 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 encompasses 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 disputes. 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.

Our message has an international appeal, even among the young of today about whom it is wrongly believed, I think, that they lack ideals and think in a materialistic way. The contacts I have had during the few years I have been President of this Academy, have given me the firm

conviction that the young have faith in ideals, such as the Olympic ideals. Youth is perhaps going through a phase of investigation and doubt. Let us therefore try to convert it and I firmly believe that, sooner or later, we will have ample proof that our efforts were not in vain.

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 Olympic Games should not be considered as an event during which only man's physical and muscular abilities are extolled. The Olympic Games are also impregnated with ethics and thoughts since each athlete who participates in the Games does not come only to affirm his muscular value but also in order to share with the other competitors a feeling of understanding, mutual respect, fraternity and friendship.

The day before yesterday, on the hill of the Pnyx, during the opening ceremony of the session, you heard the message of the new President of the I.O.C., Lord Killanin. A passage in particular drew my attention :

«The time has come for our movement to face realities and live in the century. This does not mean of course that we will renounce our ideal. It only means that we will confront problems in all sincerity. The union of all Olympic forces and the obstacles which have been strewn on our way. You will have to take the time to reflect and guide those for whom you will be responsible in the way which will be opened».

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.

Here, we shall try to convey to you its noble ambitions. You are the Elite of the sports-loving youth of your country and that is why your country greatly depends on your cooperation, in order to build a better tomorrow.

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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 Na-

tional Olympic Committees. Now however, we are happy to see that this hesitation has been erased and that the number of N.O.Cs which send 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 always be 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 future for humanity. Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish that the work of the 13th 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.

