



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE
The President

Lausanne, 22 March 2020

Dear Athletes,

In this unprecedented crisis we are all united.

Like you, we are very much concerned about what the COVID-19 pandemic is doing to people's lives. Human lives take precedence over everything, including the staging of the Games. The IOC wants to be part of the solution. Therefore we have made it our leading principle to safeguard the health of everyone involved, and to contribute to containing the virus. I would like to assure you that we will adhere to this in all our decisions concerning the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020.

The road to Tokyo is very different for each of you, coming from 206 NOCs. Many of you cannot prepare and train in the way you are used to, or even not at all because of the anti-COVID-19 measures in your country. Many of you are in training and are looking forward to making your Olympic dream come true. Many of you are already qualified for the Games; a significant number are not.

What we all share, however, is tremendous uncertainty. This uncertainty rocks our nerves and raises or strengthens doubts about a positive future; it destroys hope. Some even have to fear for their very existence. This uncertainty stems from the fact that, at this moment, nobody can really make fully reliable statements about the duration of this fight against the virus. This is true for sport, science, the media, politics, and all of society. Therefore also the IOC can unfortunately not answer all your questions. This is why we are relying on the advice of a Task Force including the World Health Organization (WHO).

As successful athletes, you know that we should never give up, even if the chance to succeed appears to be very small. Our commitment to the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 is based on this experience. It is our experience as athletes that you must always be ready to adapt to new situations. For this reason we have, as indicated before, been thinking in different scenarios and are adapting them almost day by day.

On the one hand, there are significant improvements in Japan where the people are warmly welcoming the Olympic flame. This could strengthen our confidence in our Japanese hosts that we could, with certain safety restrictions, organise Olympic Games in the country whilst respecting our principle of safeguarding the health of everyone involved. On the other hand, we have seen a dramatic increase in cases and new outbreaks of the virus in different countries on different continents. This is why we have to undertake the next step in our scenarios.

I think I can feel with those among you who consider the situation to be unsatisfactory. Even though, in very different circumstances and for very different reasons, I had an experience of uncertainty as an athlete in the lead-up to the Olympic Games Moscow 1980. We were uncertain whether the Games would take place and whether we would be allowed to participate. Quite frankly, I would have preferred it if the decision-makers then would have taken more time to decide on a more sound basis of information.

Our basis of information today is that a final decision about the date of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 now would still be premature.

So, like you, we are in a dilemma: Cancellation of the Olympic Games would destroy the Olympic dream of 11,000 athletes from all 206 National Olympic Committees, from the IOC Refugee Olympic Team, most likely for the Paralympic athletes, and for all the people who are supporting you as coaches, doctors, officials, training partners, friends and family. Cancellation would not solve any problem and would help nobody. Therefore it is not on our agenda.

A decision about a postponement today could not determine a new date for the Olympic Games because of the uncertain developments in both directions: an improvement, as we are seeing in a number of countries thanks to the severe measures being taken, or a deteriorating situation in other countries.

Contrary to other sports events, to postpone the Olympic Games is an extremely complex challenge. Just to give you some examples:

A number of critical venues needed for the Games could potentially not be available anymore. The situations with millions of nights already booked in hotels is extremely difficult to handle, and the international sports calendar for at least 33 Olympic sports would have to be adapted. These are just a few of many, many more challenges.

Therefore, further the study of different scenarios, it would need the full commitment and cooperation of the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee and the Japanese authorities, and of all the International Federations (IFs) and National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and all stakeholders of the Olympic Games. It is in light of the worldwide deteriorating situation, and in the spirit of our shared commitment to the Olympic Games, that the IOC Executive Board has today initiated the next step in our scenarios.

Together with all the stakeholders, we have started detailed discussions today to complete our assessment of the rapid development of the worldwide health situation and its impact on the Olympic Games, including a scenario of postponement. We are working very hard, and we are confident that we will have finalised these discussions within the next four weeks.

I know that this unprecedented situation leaves many of your questions open. I also know that this rational approach may not be in line with the emotions many of you have to go through. Therefore, as we try to address your situation and the questions you may have about your training, your qualification systems and your participation in the Games, we encourage you to keep an eye out for updates on Athlete365, but also to stay in close contact with your NOCs and National Federations.

I wish, and we all are working for this, that the hope of so many athletes, NOCs and IFs from all five continents have expressed will be fulfilled: that at the end of this dark tunnel we are all going through together, not knowing how long it is, the Olympic flame will be a light at the end of this tunnel.

As a fellow Olympian, I hope that you can understand our challenge, and accept and support our principles which are to safeguard your, your families' and everyone's health, and to keep your Olympic dream alive.

Wishing you, your families and your friends first of all good health and all the best, I remain,

In friendship

Mo-a. A. L.