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Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the XIII Olympic Congress.

We have gathered in this beautiful city to take stock of the Olympic Movement and to consider where we are today and where we want to be in the future.

Every branch of the Olympic Family is represented.

For the first time, we also have representatives from the public at the Congress. And, in another significant first, the public and Olympic Family members were invited to contribute ideas online as part of our *Virtual Olympic Congress*.

Those contributions serve as a valuable starting point for the discussions that we will have over the next few days.

We are very honoured by the presence of our prestigious keynote speaker, the Secretary General of the United Nations Mr Ban Ki-moon. Thank you Mr Secretary General for your support and for bringing us the presence of the nations of our world.

We have embraced the social responsibilities of our Movement. We have put sustainable development and protection of the environment at the centre of our actions and adopted Agenda 21 of the United Nations. We have adopted the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, and have developed a great partnership with the United Nations through the Olympic Truce and in areas such as development through sport, education, humanitarian aid and health protection.

We are also very honoured by the presence of tomorrow's keynote speaker, Mr José Manuel Ramos-Horta, President of East Timor and corecipient of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize.

Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of our Movement, said the role of the Congress is to provide "intellectual guidance" for our Movement. He convened the first Congress in 1894 at the Sorbonne in Paris to give life to his dream of reviving the ancient Olympic Games.

Imagine for a moment how Coubertin would react if he could see what has become of his creation. He would undoubtedly be extremely proud that his vision of a global Movement has become a reality, with 205 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and many International Federations (IFs) acting in over five continents.

He would be thrilled that the values he cherished – fair play, respect, friendship and excellence – are still the priority of the Movement he founded.

He would be amazed that more than 4 billion people have the opportunity to experience the excitement, passion and magic of the Games almost instantaneously over various media channels.

He would be gratified that the Movement rests on a solid financial foundation that can withstand even a global economic downturn and that enables rich and poor to come together and share common values.

He would be reassured that we share his contempt for cheaters and that we are working hard to eradicate doping, corruption and match fixing.

He would be very pleased that we remain focused on youth.

Coubertin highlighted the problem of youth inactivity more than a century ago. He would be dismayed to know it is still a problem. But he would be relieved to know we are doing something about it. He would be excited to learn about our plans for the first Youth Olympic Games (YOG) next year. He would definitely agree that the educational part of these Games is the most important.

He would be surprised that we are fast approaching the day when 50 percent of the athletes at the Games will be women. We have more to do, but we have made great progress.

The rules of the YOG provide for global gender parity.

And, for the first time, women will compete in every sport on the programme at the 2012 Games.

Coubertin knew that the Movement had to adapt to societal changes while remaining faithful to its core values. As he put it, "the Olympic Spirit is neither the property of one race nor of one age".

The Movement that Coubertin created 115 years ago is stronger than ever. It is our responsibility to keep it strong.

We are here to share ideas on ways to sustain and strengthen our Movement and Olympic values in this new millennium.

The overarching theme of this Congress is "The Olympic Movement and Society".

It is a broad topic, but it is appropriate because it speaks to our *raison d'être*. We exist to serve society, to place sport at the service of humanity.

We use the joy of sport to encourage physical and mental health, and to promote universal values of mutual understanding and peace, solidarity, excellence, friendship, respect and fair play.

As a values-based sport organisation, we cannot change the world on our own. But we can – and we do – help make it a better place.

We have a special obligation to put our values into action on behalf of athletes and young people – athletes because they are the heart of our Movement; young people because they are our future.

The Olympic Movement devotes considerable time, energy and resources to supporting athletes.

92 percent of the revenue that comes to the International Olympic Committee flows straight through to the IFs, NOCs, Games Organisers and other Olympic Family members that directly serve athletes.

Our Olympic Solidarity programme offers financial support and training assistance to athletes who need help.

Our rigorous anti-doping efforts help protect the health of athletes, as well as the fairness of the competition.

We do a lot for athletes, but we must do more. Our obligation extends to providing assistance with their social and professional lives, both during and after their peak competition years.

The IOC's Athlete Commission has developed a very successful strategy in this field. More must be done with our stakeholders in the social sphere: governments and the world of education and economy.

Athletes are not performing alone. They are surrounded by an influential entourage. We must make sure that coaches, trainers, managers and others in positions of influence act in the best interest of the athletes. There is no place in sport for a win-at-all-cost mentality.

A first-place finish that endangers the health and safety of an athlete is not a victory, it is a disgrace. And we should be as tough on those who encourage and assist doping as we are on the athletes who engage in it.

We should consider establishing a Trainers Commission to enable a dialogue to address these issues.

Collaboration and harmonious relationships between professional leagues and International Federations are key to a successful Games participation.

We will talk about those issues under the subtheme, "The Athletes".

Fulfilling our responsibilities toward young people is another core mission that flows from our founding values.

Sport is a powerful tool for instilling values in young people. Physical activity encourages healthy bodies and healthy minds. It teaches discipline, self-respect and the importance of setting goals. It demonstrates the value of fair play and respect for others.

In the late 1800s, Coubertin worried that youth in his native France were turning away from physical activity. Today, we see the same problem in the growing rate of youth obesity throughout the world.

Sport and other physical activity now compete with sophisticated technology based entertainment and too often lose.

The YOG and other IOC initiatives will help us address these challenges. We must do more.

Under the theme "Olympism and Youth", we will explore ways to engage and inspire the world's youth so they can enjoy the fun and the lasting rewards of sport.

Our commitment to values starts within our own organisations.

We cannot expect others to adhere to high ethical standards if we do not do so ourselves. We cannot expect proper conduct on the field of play if we do not have good governance within the Olympic Family.

And we must ensure that our organisational structure is designed to meet the needs of athletes.

We have taken a series of steps in recent years to improve our organisational structures. We have ensured that the Athletes Commission is a strong advocate for athletes.

We have also worked hard to protect the autonomy of sport – an issue that requires constant attention.

We will discuss these important issues and related topics under the theme, "The Structure of the Olympic Movement".

Another theme, "The Olympic Games", will focus on our flagship events, the Olympic Games, the Olympic Winter Games and the Youth Olympic Games.

Their status as the world's premier sporting events is critical to our Movement's success.

The Games are not an end in themselves. They are a means to an end. We owe it to the athletes, to offer them a perfect organisation of the Games. The most important is to preserve the capacity of the Games to ignite a dream in youth. The mission of the IOC is to perpetuate this dream.

We have established a process to ensure that we regularly review and refresh the Olympic Programme. We have established a knowledge transfer programme to ensure that host cities benefit from past experience. We manage the size, complexity and cost of Games.

As we work to maintain the popularity and the magic of the Games, we must also stay focused on our values and the need to ensure that developing nations are full participants.

The fifth theme, "The Digital Revolution", will explore new ways to use the reach and power of the media to promote Olympic values and the practice of sport.

Television transformed our Movement and brought the Games to a global audience. New digital and social media have expanded our reach and will help us build new relationships, especially with young people.

As you can see, we have a lot to discuss. These are exciting times for the Olympic Movement.

We face some significant external challenges – economic pressures, societal changes, political interference and all of the other issues that can intrude on the world of sport.

But our future offers far more opportunities than challenges.

Even after more than a century, we are finding new ways to strengthen the foundation that Coubertin started.

We have increased transparency and improved governance within the Movement.

We have taken steps to ensure that the concerns of athletes are heard and addressed.

We have narrowed the gender gap in sport.

We have set new records for global participation and audience share at the Olympic Games.

We have strengthened our financial reserves to help those in need and to guard against unforeseen challenges.

We have made great strides in the fight against doping and match fixing.

And, most importantly, we have stayed true to our core values.

We are here to continue this quest for improvement. As we go about this task, we need to show the same boldness and daring thought as our founder.

We shall not find all the answers at this Congress. There will be disagreements. But open, honest and lively debate will lead us in the right direction.

It is now our turn to look to the future. We are here to make sure that the Olympic Movement continues to serve the athletes, the world's young people and society as a whole for the decades to come.

I thank you for being here, and ask you to devote your energies to thinking about this important cause.