



International  
Olympic  
Committee

**72<sup>nd</sup> session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme**

**4 – 8 October 2021**

**Agenda item 3: General debate**

**Statement by the International Olympic Committee**

Vice-Chair, High Commissioner, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) commends the tireless work and commitment of UNHCR staff who, in a context aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, continue to relentlessly deliver protection and humanitarian assistance to an unprecedented and continuously growing number of forcibly displaced people around the globe.

As the 2<sup>nd</sup> fundamental principle of Olympism states, *The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.* In this spirit and for now almost three decades, through a partnership with UNHCR that has gone from strength to strength, the IOC has been committed to using sport, and the spotlight that the Olympic Games offer, to enhance the lives of individuals and communities affected by displacement.

This commitment has not been altered by the COVID-19 pandemic and year 2021 marks an even more comprehensive approach by the IOC through the adoption of Olympic Agenda 2020 + 5; a series of 15 recommendations including one specifically (rec. 11) focused on reinforcing support to displaced people through sport.

At the Olympic Games in Tokyo, we saw the participation of a 29-member IOC Refugee Olympic Team; A team of remarkable athletes representing the millions of refugees and displaced people worldwide whom the High Commissioner had the privilege of meeting this summer in Tokyo and I am sure, many of you followed and cheered on.

In addition to assisting these athletes, the IOC is committed to supporting displaced young people 365 days a year. In this spirit and growing from the longstanding partnership with UNHCR, in 2017 we opened our next chapter by launching the Olympic Refugee Foundation with a vision for a society where everyone belongs, through sport. Currently, 200,000 young people have been reached by sports programmes delivered

in eight countries (Colombia, Rwanda, Turkey, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jordan, Kenya, Uganda and Mexico). The next programme is planned in the coming months in the Île-de-France region in France, host of the future Summer Olympic Games Paris 2024.

Together with UNHCR and the SCORT Foundation, the Olympic Refugee Foundation convenes the Global Sport for Refugees Coalition launched on the occasion of the Global Refugee Forum in 2019, and formed by over 80 organisations – Governments, National Olympic Committees, International Paralympic Committee, International Sports Federations, clubs, associations and civil society organisations – all committed to :

*Promoting, increasing and ensuring access for all refugees to safe and inclusive sporting facilities; organised sports and sport-based initiatives; and participation in sporting events and competitions at all levels.*

Despite this important progress and growing engagement, challenges remain in the implementation of this commitment and require close collaboration with governments and common solutions in order to address the legal and administrative barriers (e.g., quota regulations, documentation requirements) which continue to effectively prevent or at least limit refugees' equal access to amateur and competitive sports; ensure that sport is systematically embedded in national/regional refugee response frameworks and ensure that refugee athletes can access national vaccination campaigns and get valid residence and travel permits to travel to countries where sports competitions are held without restrictions.

Through the Olympic Refugee Foundation, our ambition is to unite a team formed by leaders, businesses, coaches, athletes and displaced young people across the world to ensure young people affected by displacement can rebuild their lives through sport, find somewhere to belong again and, learn skills that help them thrive. We are enthused to count not only on UNHCR support but also the Member States on board with us, to realise our ambition for 1 million young people affected by displacement to access safe sport by 2024 and thereby deliver on our shared commitment to the Global Compact on Refugees that so rightly recognises the important role that sport can play in realising social development, inclusion, cohesion, and wellbeing for refugees.

The newly adopted Olympic Motto is an apt conclusion. We are Faster, Higher, Stronger - Together.

Thank you.