

**SPEECH BY WADA PRESIDENT WITOLD BAŃKA TO THE MINISTERS  
OF SPORT AND SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS OF CENTRAL  
AND WEST ASIA  
20 OCTOBER 2021**

Honorable Ministers and representatives of Governments from Central and West Asia, WADA Foundation Board Members, ladies and gentlemen. Hello dear colleagues, greetings from Warsaw, Poland. As President of the World Anti-Doping Agency and a former Minister for Sport in the Polish Government, it is my honor to have the opportunity to address you today. I am pleased to say that I am joined at this meeting by WADA's Vice-President Yang Yang, Director General Olivier Niggli, the Director of our Asia and Oceania Office Kazuhiro Hayashi, and Senior Director for Stakeholder Engagement and Partnerships, René Bouchard. We are all here to support you and collaborate with you in your anti-doping efforts.

Unfortunately, given the world we live in, we are not able to meet in person as has been the tradition for this meeting since 2004. However, there is light at the end of the tunnel and we hope to be with you face-to-face again soon. I had the pleasure in August of being in Tokyo to represent WADA at the 138<sup>th</sup> International Olympic Committee Session and other activities associated with the Olympic Games. It was a great pleasure for me to return to the Asia region – in particular for such an exciting reason.

It is a privilege for me as a former Sports Minister and as a former athlete at the international level, to head WADA as it fulfils its mission to lead a collaborative worldwide movement for doping-free sport. Since WADA was formed in 1999, great strides have been taken in the pursuit of clean sport. It has been more than two decades of progress, cooperation and hard work on behalf of the athletes of the world.

Probably the most important of WADA's achievements has been the development and implementation of the World Anti-Doping Code first launched in 2004 and revised three times since. This document harmonizes anti-doping policies, rules and regulations across all sports and all countries around the globe. The Code is at the heart of the global anti-doping program. In conjunction with eight International Standards, it provides clarity and unity where once there was uncertainty and disagreement. These Standards cover the areas of:

1. The List of Prohibited Substances and Methods;
2. Testing and Investigations;
3. Laboratories;
4. Therapeutic Use Exemptions;
5. Protection of Privacy and Personal Information;
6. Code Compliance by Signatories;
7. Education; and
8. Results Management.

Overall, the harmonization of this wide range of activities has been a remarkable success. Think about it. There are not many aspects of modern life, if any, that have achieved the level of international acceptance of very detailed rules and the cooperation that it requires as in sports anti-doping. The end result is that we have a system that works well.

In parallel, the UNESCO Convention Against Doping in Sport provides public authorities with a legal framework. Through this, your governments can address specific areas of doping that are outside the domain of the sports movement. The Convention is now ratified by 191 countries, including almost every country in Asia, covering more than 99% of the world's population.

Despite the clear improvements that have been made in the past 20 years, we are not so naïve as to think that WADA – or the anti-doping system in general – is perfect. There is always room for improvement. In July 2020, WADA published its Five-Year Strategic Plan under the theme 'Leading Anti-Doping in a New Era'. The Plan lays the foundation for WADA's strategic activity for 2020-2024 focusing on six strategic priorities around leadership, growing impact, putting athletes at the center, collaboration and unity, visibility and high performance.

To maintain a path of progress, it requires the right planning and strong leadership. To that end, like any organization, we consider it to be vitally important that we keep reviewing our governance model to make sure it

remains fit for purpose. The vast majority of 70 reforms approved by WADA's Board at the end of 2018 have been fully implemented with the remainder having been well progressed. Overall, the reforms are ensuring that there are more independent voices, more athletes and more National Anti-Doping Organizations involved in decision-making. Olivier will elaborate on the Strategic Plan and Governance in his remarks.

It's important to recall that WADA was set up as a collaboration between partners. That collegial spirit endures. It is my belief that the only way to meet the challenges we face is by working together. We must make the most of our diverse strengths with the common goal of providing athletes with a level playing field on which they can compete fairly. Government Ministers and officials, sports administrators, lab workers, scientists, investigators, anti-doping and legal experts, educators, and athletes – we all have a part to play. WADA's role is not simply to be the global regulator, monitoring the program and stepping in when things go wrong. We are here to assist, to help, to advise, to find solutions and to help implement them. That's what collaboration between partners means to me.

Referring back to the challenges that I mentioned previously, let me highlight just some of the main ones we are facing together:

1. COVID-19 and its impact on the upcoming Olympic and Paralympic Games in Beijing.
2. Ensuring that Anti-Doping Organizations around the world are strong.

3. Funding for anti-doping.
4. Athlete empowerment.

## **COVID AND THE OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES**

As it relates to the pandemic, this past year or so has been extremely difficult for everyone. Nowhere and no one has avoided the impact of COVID-19, including the sports community. Since the start, WADA's number-one priority has been public safety, including that of athletes, doping control officers and everyone involved in the system.

With the leadership of WADA, the anti-doping community is getting through this pandemic and is making sure the system remains strong. Since March 2020, WADA has been providing detailed guidance and support for Anti-Doping Organizations and athletes, which it has been updating as the situation has evolved.

I am happy to say that testing is back to normal levels. In fact, when it comes to out-of-competition testing, we are seeing levels 15-20% higher now than for the same period in 2019. Based on these great outcomes. The anti-doping programs in the build up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo were successfully conducted. This is a tribute to the hard work, dedication and ingenuity of Anti-Doping Organizations, and WADA wishes to commend them and athletes for the commitment and flexibility have shown during the pandemic.

With an eye on the upcoming Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in Beijing – now just over three months away – WADA has been supporting the work of the International Olympic Committee and the International Testing Agency in a number of specific ways to help maintain the integrity of the Games. In particular, WADA will assist the work of the pre-Games Taskforce, which is ensuring that all athletes headed for Beijing have been subject to an adequate amount of testing. We are also working hard to ensure that the WADA-accredited laboratory in Beijing is ready for the challenge of the Games. On the success of the Tokyo Long Term Storage Program the IOC is considering the extension of this program for the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games for NADO's and International Federations. As detection methods are constantly being improved and updated, retaining samples for up to 10 years means that those who have taken a prohibited substance cannot rest easy for a full decade after they have been tested. This is a powerful deterrent.

WADA will also carry out Independent Observer (IO) programs during the Beijing Games. Specifically, the expert members of the IO teams will monitor all aspects of the anti-doping process being operated by the International Testing Agency for the Olympics (on behalf of the IOC), and by the International Paralympic Committee for the Paralympics. The teams will provide daily feedback as to possible improvements that could be made to



the anti-doping program, and afterwards will issue reports that will formalize recommendations for the IOC, the IPC, the WADA-accredited laboratory in Beijing, the organizing committees, and WADA. This is all designed to enhance athlete and public confidence in the anti-programs during the Games and those at future events.

With all this preparation, WADA is optimistic for the success of Beijing 2022 as we seek to provide all athletes with the level playing field they deserve.

### **BUILDING CAPACITY IN NADOs AND RADOs**

Documents like the aforementioned World Anti-Doping Code and the related International Standards are vitally important. But we know full well that they are only as good as how well they are implemented. In the real world, success in this area depends on the various National and Regional Anti-Doping Organizations (NADOs and RADOs) all over the world. While WADA's Program Development and NADO/RADO Relations Department does a great job in providing quality oversight, advice and support to the NADOs and RADOs, there is no substitute for the support they get at home from their respective public authorities. Ministers, your support and leadership for a strong program in each of your countries is critical. The anti-doping environment is becoming increasingly complex and fast moving – the NADOs and RADOs need to have the capacity and resources to deliver on their mandate. The legitimacy of the anti-doping system and the athletes' perception of it are at stake.

## **FUNDING**

Another of my main priorities as President is to increase overall funding for WADA and anti-doping. Annually, WADA receives about USD 40 million, half of which is provided by the governments of the world, including yours, and the other half comes from sports. We are grateful for your continued support. However, this is a modest budget when you consider the scale of our mission and the revenues that sport generates. WADA's mission is to protect sport across nearly 200 countries and in all sports. Each year, we are asked to take on more, whether that it is in the field of education, intelligence and investigations, scientific research, capacity-building or the various other types of work we do. WADA is financially stable and does very well on limited means. Clearly, however, we do not have the resources to meet all the expectations of our stakeholders. If WADA is to safeguard clean sport in a bold and comprehensive way, it must secure the additional support it needs.

On this note, I take this opportunity to thank the Governments of China, India and Saudi Arabia which recently made additional contributions totaling USD 2.5 million. WADA will primarily dedicate this to scientific research, as well as our intelligence and investigations activities. This additional contribution is part of an initiative announced in November 2019 by IOC President Thomas Bach aimed at further strengthening WADA's research and investigations activities. Under this initiative, additional contributions provided by Governments are matched by the International Olympic Committee. Therefore, this commitment from the region will yield 5 million





USD. It is contributing greatly to WADA's efforts to level the playing field for athletes worldwide for which we are grateful.

But it should not be up to Governments and the IOC to shoulder the financial burden of anti-doping alone. This is why in the weeks to come WADA will be actively seeking support from the private sector to help address some of the inequalities that exist in the world in terms of anti-doping.

We are increasing our effort to encourage other organizations to support clean sport and we are showing them the value of doing so. Many sponsors and private companies invest in sport through sponsorship and marketing – so we believe they share a motivation to ensure that clean sport is protected at all times. It is part of their corporate social responsibility.

With the increased funding, we would improve testing, research, and educational activities as well as anti-doping build capacity in the countries where it is most needed.

## **EMPOWERING ATHLETES**

As it relates to athletes, the empowerment of athletes is something very close to my heart. As a former elite athlete, I understand the importance of listening to the views of athletes worldwide. So far, I have met with hundreds of athletes and their representatives and this engagement will continue throughout my presidency. Indeed, this approach is also part of WADA's overall commitment to being more athlete-centered, as outlined in the

Strategic Plan. In fact, we are seeing good progress in amplifying the athletes' voices. Athletes now have a presence on every one of WADA's Standing Committees. One-third of both Foundation Board and Executive Committee members are former athletes, bringing that perspective to the decision-making table and ensuring that WADA maintains an athlete focus in all that it does.

## **CONCLUSION**

In closing, dear colleagues, I want to thank you for your unwavering commitment to anti-doping. In collaboration with our Asia-Oceania Office, I particularly urge you to continue your support of your NADOs and RADOs, to give them the budget that they need and also to be strong ambassadors in your nations of our collective mission for doping-free sport. In that regard, I congratulate you for the work you are carrying out promoting regional cooperation and partnership. For example, there is a series of workshops being held during October and November that is helping National Anti-Doping Organizations in the Gulf States to implement their own individual development plans. This is very important and worthwhile work as it will help to build anti-doping capacity in this region.

In closing, I would like to say that WADA is here for you. Day in, day out, WADA will continue to collaborate with athletes, Governments, sports organizations and all our partners worldwide to strengthen the World Anti-Doping Program. We are committed to building anti-doping capacity and



community, and to securing the additional funding that is required to further enable doping-free sport. We are confident that with the support of all our clean sport partners, including the governments of Central and West Asia, we will succeed.

Thank you once again for sharing your time today with us. My WADA colleagues and I are happy to answer any questions you might have. But first I would like to call on the Vice-President of WADA and two-time Olympic Champion in short-track speed skating, Yang Yang, who is joining us today from China.

Thank you.