



**SPEECH BY WITOLD BAŃKA, WORLD ANTI-DOPING AGENCY
PRESIDENT FOR THE OPENING OF THE 17TH ASIA/OCEANIA
REGION INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING ON ANTI-DOPING IN
SPORT, HOSTED BY THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, DUBAI IN
COOPERATION WITH WADA**

14 – 15 MARCH 2022

Your Excellency, Dr Ahmad Belhoul Al Falasi, (President of the General Authority of Sports of the United Arab Emirates), Honorable Ministers and representatives of Governments from the Asia and Oceania regions, WADA Executive and Foundation Board Members, Dr Sultan of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), Mr Marcos Diaz, UNESCO Chairperson of the Bureau of the COP for the Anti-Doping Convention, Dr Reema Alhosani, President of the National Anti-Doping Agency, of the United Arab Emirates, ladies and gentlemen.

Dear colleagues, my personal greetings to each of you joining us here today and also virtually from across Asia and Oceania.



It is a great privilege for me to be here in person, and for us to join together again. It has been almost three years since the last such meeting was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in April, 2019.

First, I wish to thank our very gracious hosts, Dr Ahmad Belhoul Al Falasi, President of the General Authority of Sports, thank you for your welcome and kind words.

As President of WADA, I am very grateful to the hosts, for organizing this meeting. It is being held in-person and virtually under very difficult conditions. It is not an easy task to bring everything together like this so well done for do so successfully.

When we reflect on 2021 and the last month, particularly for the Asian region, it is important to recognize the hard work and dedication that went into staging both the Summer Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games and most recently the Beijing Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. Both were hosted in such difficult circumstances. They were each truly unique Games. They each produced amazing performances that will live long in



our memories. Those games were very successful, and they demonstrate the growing importance of sports in Asia.

Since WADA was formed in 1999, great strides have been made in the pursuit of clean sport. It has been 22 years of progress, cooperation and hard work on behalf of the athletes of the world. An element of this meeting is the opportunity for WADA to share with you the progress that has been made in the past year. But it also an opportunity to engage with you in discussion. It is an opportunity for me, for WADA's Vice-President Yang Yang and for our Director General, Olivier Niggli, to ensure that you are kept up to date with what is going on in anti-doping at the global level. It is an opportunity to provide you with clear information on the role and priorities of WADA, and our program interventions in support of delivering on our mandate. We will always be open and honest about the challenges we are facing.

But more importantly, it is an opportunity to hear from you. We will be delighted to respond to and learn from your questions, comments or concerns. We want to consider the important role governments in Asia and Oceania play in the anti-doping eco-system and find ways to support and enhance that contribution.



Later this morning, WADA's Director General, Olivier Niggli, will outline WADA's strategic priorities 2022-2024 so that you will better understand what we are aiming to achieve for the investment everyone here has in WADA. WADA's Vice-President will open the afternoon sessions and speak about the importance of education and the progress made in this area.

The largest element of this important meeting is the country reports.

This presents an opportunity for me and indeed for all of us, to hear from each country gathered here – there are 45 countries joining-in today. That is a record number. And I for one am looking forward to hearing your news, learning about each of your anti-doping programs, the challenges, the progress, the needs – so that we can learn from each other in our work as partners to protect clean athletes.

From my perspective there are three important aspects of anti-doping which need to be remembered and considered during the course of the meeting, today and tomorrow.



The first is the need for the global anti-doping system to be strong. That is, for each country to have a robust and relevant program. To accomplish this, we must collaborate. Governments play a crucial role and must be receptive to unlocking and enabling the creation of strong and relevant anti-doping programs at the national level.

Long gone are the days when some claimed their athletes would never cheat. We must not be naïve – doping can happen anywhere. No country and no sport is immune. Having strong testing, investigations and education programs in place to safeguard against it happening sends the right message. It will leave athletes in no doubt that the authorities take the matter seriously and will always support them to compete clean throughout their careers.

Secondly, the issue of funding for anti-doping is a critical consideration. At WADA we are all too aware that not all sports or governments have unlimited resources. We are also aware that government treasuries have many competing priorities. However, when you consider the need to ensure the health and wellbeing of athletes, coupled with the immense negative



effect that doping takes on families, societies, national pride and global prestige, it is vitally important to put anti-doping safeguards in place.

Thirdly and finally, I would like to say something about our number-one priority – the athletes. Anti-doping is all about the wellbeing of athletes and giving them the opportunity to compete on a level playing field. A key priority identified in WADA’s Strategic Plan 2020-2024 is to be more athlete-centered so that whatever we do, we do it with the participation of the athletes of the world.

We will continue to ensure that the athletes’ voices are heard. The WADA Athlete Committee – as well as some of our other Standing Committees – are well served by the presence of athletes from Asia and Oceania, who are nominated to serve on these bodies, and they have always been very vocal and astute on matters affecting Asian and Oceania athletes, in particular.

In closing, I would like to thank Dr Reema Alhonsi and her team, for organizing this important event. This annual seminar is now one of the highlights of the global anti-doping calendar. It brings together the anti-



doping community in the Asia and Oceania regions in a spirit of collaboration. It helps motivate and inform. It offers the opportunity for all of us to learn more from one another and how each of us can advance Clean Sport.

Thank you all for your efforts and your commitment.

Enjoy the meeting!