



# **SPEECH BY WITOLD BAŃKA, WADA PRESIDENT WADA VIRTUAL FORUM WITH SPORTS MINISTERS IN THE CARIBBEAN REGION**

**12 OCTOBER 2022**

Honorable Ministers and representatives of Governments from the Caribbean region, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Dear colleagues, my personal greetings to each of you today, from wherever across the Caribbean you are joining us.

It is a great privilege for me to be able to address you today. As President of WADA, I am very grateful that you were able to join this important forum. I am grateful to the Government of Jamaica for helping us to organize it.

The idea for the meeting came out of a discussion with the Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport at the Government of Jamaica, the Honorable Olivia Grange. We thought it would benefit all concerned to facilitate a discussion on anti-doping in sport. The intention is to strengthen our relationship with you, the Caribbean nations, and to offer WADA's support and solidarity every step of your journey. WADA's mission is to lead a collaborative movement towards doping-free sport and that means standing shoulder to shoulder with all governments of the world who are dedicated to providing a clean sport environment for their athletes.

We have organized similar meetings to this in Asia, Oceania and Africa. Together, we took a look at the latest anti-doping situation where they operated. Many of the challenges and opportunities you face here in the Caribbean are similar to those in other regions. But some are unique to you. Together we can identify those strengths and weaknesses, and work out how to maximize the potential of this great sporting region.

In many ways, the countries of the Caribbean punch above their weight when it comes to continental and international sport. Whether it is athletics, soccer, cricket, netball or a range of other sports, this region is well represented and has seen great success at all levels. It is in all our interests to see that success continue in a sustainable way that emphasizes the protection of clean sport and unwavering support for athletes.

Since WADA was formed in 1999, great strides have been made in the pursuit of clean sport. It has been 23 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 recent past. But it also an opportunity to engage with you in discussion. Our Director General, Olivier Niggli, and I want to ensure that you are kept up to date with what is going on in anti-doping at the global level. We wish 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 a chance 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 this region play in the anti-doping eco-system and find ways to support and enhance that contribution.

In a short while, WADA's Director General, Olivier Niggli, will outline some of the challenges in the region including around testing, capacity-building, resources for National and Regional Anti-Doping Organizations and how governments can further commit to supporting clean sport in the Caribbean.

From my perspective, there are three important aspects of anti-doping which always need to be remembered and considered.

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 most sports and governments have limited resources. 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. WADA is well served by the presence of athletes from all over the world, who are nominated to serve on our various committees. With the establishment of a new Athlete Council in the near future, that influence is only going to grow.

In support of those athletes, I am delighted to note some high-profile opportunities on the horizon. For example, we all know the importance of ensuring a strong anti-doping program is in place in preparation for the 24th Central American and Caribbean Games in El Salvador in June-July 2023; the Commonwealth Youth Games in Trinidad and Tobago in August 2023; and the Pan-American Games in Santiago, Chile, towards the end of next year. The eyes of millions of sports fans from all over the region and the world will be on you and it is vital we do not let these chances slip by.



In closing, I thank you again for your attendance here today and for your warm welcome to me and WADA's Director General, Olivier Niggli. Please enjoy the meeting, participate actively to the open and honest discussions and give us the benefit of your experience in the area of anti-doping and the broader sporting world.

Thank you all for your efforts and your commitment.