

WB Speech – WADA Asia/Oceania Intergovernmental Meeting Tashkent, Uzbekistan May 22

Honorable Ministers; other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my pleasure to be with you here in Tashkent. I wish to thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. In particular, I would like to thank the Minister of Sport of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Minister Adkham Ikramov and all the team of the Uzbekistan Anti-Doping Agency for the invitation to come here and represent the World Anti-Doping Agency. It is my pleasure also that I am joined by the WADA Vice-President Yang Yang and the Director General Olivier Niggli. You will be hearing from them a little later.

First, I would like to extend my gratitude to the Government of Uzbekistan and the National Anti-Doping Organization of Uzbekistan for helping us to organize this forum today. Thanks are due, in particular, to the Minister of Youth Policy and Sports of the Republic of Uzbekistan, His Excellency Adham Ikramov, and to the director general of the Uzbekistan NADO, Mr. Abdushukur Sadikov. Your commitment to WADA's mission is important and very much appreciated.

As always, I am very pleased to have a chance to meet with so many ministers from all over Asia and Oceania. It is very encouraging for us to witness the high level of commitment once again from the key stakeholders in anti-doping in the region. This is the 19th edition of this meeting. Each year, we gather to connect, learn and improve the ways we uphold the values of clean sport in this part of the world. We have more than 90 ministers and anti-doping leaders in attendance here today. I look forward to connecting with many of you over the next few days.

I also want to recognize your dedication to anti-doping in your countries and throughout this region. Asia and Oceania are extremely important to WADA. Sport plays an enormous role in everyday life and culture here. Asia is now firmly at the center of the sporting world. The three most recent Olympic and Paralympic Games have been held in this region with PyeongChang in 2018 being followed by Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022. The way those events were organized was very impressive, especially when you consider the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Asian Games, held in Hangzhou in September of last year, were well presented. The Winter Youth Olympic Games took place in February 2024 in Gangwon, South Korea.

Looking ahead, it is also important to note that the Asian Youth Games will be held right here in Uzbekistan in 2025. We are grateful to our kind hosts who have invited us to visit the site of the Youth Games Olympic Village later this week.

As many of you know, WADA's presence in the Asia and Oceania region is built upon our regional office in Tokyo, Japan. For 20 years, this office was led by Mr. Kazuhiro Hayashi. Our dear friend Kazu retired at the end of 2023. He leaves behind him an incredible legacy. During which time with WADA, he built the Agency's presence in Asia/Oceania and made a significant and lasting impact on anti-doping in the region and worldwide. I would like to thank and acknowledge all that Kazu did for clean sport throughout his career.

On that note, it is with great pleasure that I can introduce you all to Dr. Mayumi YaYa Yamamoto, WADA's new Director of the Asia-Oceania Office. Dr. Yamamoto is certainly familiar to many of you here today. She is from Japan and is a former competitive basketball player. Dr.

Yamamoto has been involved in anti-doping since 2009 and for most of that time has been working for the Japan Anti-Doping Agency where she worked collaboratively with governments, anti-doping agencies, and sports organizations of the Asia/Oceania region.

She believes strongly in the strength of this region. She is passionate about the power of clean sport to change lives and communities. I have no doubt that YaYa will provide you with great advice and guidance as we work closely together for the protection of clean sport in Asia and Oceania.

Looking forward, the 2024 Paris Summer Games are right around the corner. A lot of preparation has gone into ensuring that the anti-doping program is in place. WADA is also looking forward to coming back to the region at the end of the year. In December 2024, WADA's Executive Committee and Foundation Board meetings will be held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. I would like to highlight the presence of Mr. Abdulaziz Almasaed, Deputy Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs for Saudi Arabia, among us today. It is an honour to welcome you here, and we are very much looking forward to those meetings in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the end of the year.

We are also just a year and a half away from the start of the 2025 World Conference on Doping in Sport, which for the first time will take place in Asia. The city of Busan, South Korea, will be the scene for this important clean sport gathering. The World Conference will convene athletes and more than 1,500 representatives from the Sport Movement, Governments, National and Regional Anti-Doping Organizations, laboratories, service providers, researchers and the media – all that are integral to the mission for doping-free sport.

I am also pleased to share that representatives from all five Regional Anti-Doping Organizations from Asia and Oceania are present here today. These RADOs play a critical role in supporting their member countries in implementing anti-doping programs in their respective regions. Your hard work does not go unnoticed. It is tremendously important to the success of anti-doping programs in Asia and Oceania.

Before we get into today's business, I must address the story that has created some headlines in a few western countries lately. I am referring to the 2021 contamination case involving 23 Chinese swimmers. I want to reiterate to you today that at all stages of this case, WADA has acted with due diligence and according to the agreed process and rules of the World Anti-Doping Code. WADA reviewed this case professionally and thoroughly from scientific, intelligence and legal perspectives.

Despite all the attention created around this story, nobody has been able to produce any evidence that would allow a successful prosecution of these cases. Based on all available scientific evidence and intelligence, WADA had no basis under the World Anti-Doping Code to challenge CHINADA's findings of environmental contamination. This position was also independently reached by World Aquatics, which equally decided not to appeal the decision.

Last week, WADA also convened an extraordinary meeting of its Foundation Board, where members representing sports, athletes and governments of the world, as well as independent members, expressed their support for the Agency. My hope is that, with today's Resolution, WADA can also count on the support of the representatives from the Asia and Oceania region.

I will repeat what we have said since the moment these untrue claims were published. In the absence of any other evidence, WADA, still today, stands by the results of its rigorous scientific investigation, as well as the approach of its Intelligence and Investigations, and Legal Affairs Departments.

In light of the damaging allegations against WADA, we have responded to calls from a certain number of stakeholders for a review. Following the approval of WADA's Executive Committee, we have invited an independent prosecutor, Mr. Eric Cottier, to conduct a thorough review of WADA's handling of the matter. His report will be delivered prior to the opening of the Olympic Games in July. Entirely independent of WADA, the Sport Movement and Governments, Mr. Cottier is a prosecutor of 39 years' experience.

We are pleased to be able to put this matter into the hands of an experienced, respected and independent prosecutor, who has accepted on short notice to take on this task and produce a thorough report in short order.

Now, I would like to turn our attention back to this important forum. Later today, WADA's Director General, Olivier Niggli, will update you on our strategic priorities. Of particular note is the work of the 2027 World Anti-Doping Code Update Drafting Team. This Working Group is responsible for reviewing and considering feedback from WADA stakeholders with regards to the 2027 Code. They will provide expert advice and recommendations. In due course, they will draft proposed amendments to an updated version of the Code. I will let Olivier tell you more about that.

Of course, as a global regulator, WADA's efforts extend beyond this region. In March, we held our Annual Symposium in Lausanne. It is always a good opportunity for the global anti-doping community to come together and discuss the latest developments in the world of clean sport. Amidst all the usual conference activities we marked WADA's 25-year anniversary. It has been a quarter century of challenges, of progress and, ultimately, of success as WADA continues to build a more robust anti-doping system.

At this year's Symposium, we decided to hold an Executive Committee meeting on the eve of the opening day to allow members to attend. Of the many important discussions that took place during that ExCo meeting, I would like to highlight one in particular. It was agreed that WADA's compliance monitoring process can be further refined to make it more workable for World Anti-Doping Code Signatories. This is especially the case when it comes to ensuring that national legislation, where it is in place, is in line with the Code. We recognize that this can put additional pressure on NADOs. We commit to working closely with you to find a process that works for all. A protocol on this matter will be presented at the Executive Committee meeting in September, in Türkiye.

Also highlighted at the Annual Symposium was the work currently being carried out in the area of Intelligence and Investigations. Over the past year or so, we have been bringing together anti-doping experts from NADOs and law enforcement agencies (including customs) in Europe to work together. This pilot project is proving to be very successful. In fact, it is better than even our most optimistic expectations. Together we have already dismantled several illicit steroid laboratories. We have seized 15 tonnes of performance enhancing drugs – that's roughly 288 million doses of drugs. And numerous athletes have been caught doping. It is an excellent example of what can be achieved if we all work together.

Due to this success, the WADA Intelligence and Investigations Department has decided to expand this project worldwide, starting with the Asia and Oceania region. WADA I&I has already begun discussing the next phase with our partners at INTERPOL, Sport Integrity Australia and Drug Free Sport New Zealand in order to bring this successful concept to this part of the world. We are looking forward to the continued expansion of this impactful project in the years to come.

I briefly mentioned Paris 2024 earlier. Plans are now at a very advanced stage. In collaboration with the International Olympic Committee and International Testing Agency, we are doing everything in our power to ensure a clean and fair competition for all athletes of the world. WADA Director General, Olivier Niggli, will go into more detail on that during his presentation. He will also discuss some of WADA's other activities. This includes the advancements being made in the areas of education, science, legal affairs, program development and of course collaborations.

I really believe the communication and engagement we have developed with important clean sport stakeholders, especially athletes, is working. To illustrate that, it was very encouraging to see that our 2024 Play True Day digital campaign on 19 April was a great success. It achieved a potential social media reach of almost 200 million impressions around the globe. This exceeds our previous high of 161 million last year. I would like to commend the efforts of the NADOs, many from the Asia and Oceania region, who take pride in contributing to this annual campaign. In 2025, I challenge you all to do even more to encourage athletes from your respective countries to participate in the Play True Day campaign. Athletes' voices must be heard.

In closing, I know that everyone in this room cares deeply about tackling the doping problem. We all want to instill a culture of clean sport that upholds your countries' reputations and ultimately protects athletes. I would like to thank you all for being part of this global effort. I know I can count on your dedication. We are aware of the challenges you face. It is not always easy. It requires significant resources to run effective testing and education programs. Governments face tough choices, and resources are limited. But I know that I can count on you to do your part for anti-doping.

Every stakeholder has a role to play. Each cannot do it alone. Collaboration is the key to unlocking the clean sport challenge. My pledge to you today is this: WADA will always stand ready to help you in your efforts. We can provide advice and practical assistance to all our stakeholders as they push towards a stronger anti-doping system. Please use us for that.

Now more than ever, it is crucial that we continue to develop a strong, united community. WADA and the global anti-doping system has grown stronger in recent years. What we have to do is to continue working together. We must be united. I hope that we can count on our partners in the Asia and Oceania region to stand with WADA during these challenging times.

Going forward, we must continue to reinforce confidence and trust in the global anti-doping system. So just as I commit to increasing WADA's efforts, I also call on you to stand strong with us against those who would cheat the system, and to make your presence felt in a spirit of collaboration and positivity.

Thank you once again for the warm welcome I have received here. I urge you all to make the most of the time we have together. 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.