

Speech by Witold Bańka, WADA President World Conference on Doping in Sport, Opening Ceremony Busan, South Korea – 2 December 2025

Ladies and Gentlemen, IOC President, IOC honorary President, former WADA Presidents Distinguished Ministers, dear colleagues, dear friends,

It is a great honor for me, as President of WADA, to open the sixth World Conference on Doping in Sport here in Busan — a city that welcomes the world and symbolizes connection and progress; and an event that embodies shared responsibility for the future of clean sport.

I want to extend our sincere gratitude to the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the City of Busan, and the Korea Anti-Doping Agency for their warm hospitality and exceptional partnership in hosting this global gathering.

Before we begin this evening, allow me to offer heartfelt thanks to several remarkable individuals whose presence here in Busan carries deep meaning for our global collaborative movement for doping-free sport.

I am very pleased to welcome two former WADA Presidents – the Founding President, Richard Pound, and Sir Craig Reedie. We also remember the late John Fahey. These were exceptional leaders whose vision, courage, and determination built the foundations of anti-doping. The system we continue to strengthen today stands on the pillars that they created. The presence here of Richard Pound and Sir Craig Reedie, together, is a powerful symbol of unity across generations of WADA leadership — a message to the world that this mission transcends personalities and eras.

We are also deeply honoured by the presence of Kirsty Coventry, the IOC's 10th President. An Olympic champion and an inspiring leader whose legacy reflects the very best of Olympic spirit. Kirsty, your presence reminds us why we do this work: because behind every rule, every program, every sample, and every investigation, there are athletes whose dreams deserve protection.

My sincere gratitude also goes to the IOC's Honorary President Thomas Bach, whose lifelong commitment to the values of sport has shaped and inspired the global Olympic community over decades. President Bach, thank you for your presence here this week.

To the athletes, thank you for making your voices heard, which keeps us grounded in our mission. To the Sport Movement, Governments, National and Regional Anti-Doping Organizations, laboratories, service providers, researchers and more, thank you for your trust and your partnership -- and to the countless others whose work may go unacknowledged – thank you for gathering here in Busan. Your presence and your contribution strengthens our collective mission.

As we open this conference, I would like to begin with something simple and personal.

Before I entered the world of sport governance and politics, first as Minister of Sport and Tourism in Poland and then in my current role with WADA, I was a young 400-metre runner on a modest track. I was still learning who I was – and who I wanted to become. At the time, my coach said something to me that I have carried with me ever since. He said: “It is better to finish last with honor...than to win through doping.”

It wasn't dramatic.

It wasn't poetic.

It was simply true.

And, that truth shaped my entire understanding of sport. That the value of an athlete is not found in medals, but rather in integrity. Clean sport is not just about fair play –It is about character, resilience, humility, and honesty. It is about dignity -- whether an athlete wins or loses.

This is why this Conference matters...why our mission matters...

Today's threats are unlike anything my generation could have imagined.

Doping is no longer an isolated act. It is powered by advanced chemistry, sophisticated technology, illicit laboratories organized criminal systems and global black markets.

Somewhere, right now, a talented teenager is being tempted or pressured – long before they understand what is at stake by forces that do not have their best interests at heart.

We must be stronger than the forces that are trying to lure them away from competing clean.

This requires bold investment in scientific research that can outwit those that are trying to work against our mission.

It requires global investigative networks capable of dismantling criminal supply chains.

It requires that athletes – the great majority of which want to remain clean – have access to anti-doping education before they may make an irreversible mistake.

And it requires unity.

This unity has been tested. Recently, some voices have chosen confrontation over cooperation, speaking as if their nations or institutions stand above others – as if only they acted with integrity.

Let me be unmistakably clear:

WADA treats every athlete and every organization equally – regardless of nation, region, size or sporting tradition. There are no superior countries in anti-doping. No privileged voices. No moral hierarchies. No single group has all the answers.

And to those who behave as though they come from “better” systems, expecting the world to follow their personal crusades, we say respectfully but firmly: no.

Anti-doping does not belong to one nation or one personality.

It belongs to the world.

Our responsibility is to protect all athletes – from the most powerful sporting nations to the least. From well-resourced programs to those still building capacity.

Fairness only matters when it applies to everyone.

Tomorrow, during the first full day of this World Conference, I will present our detailed roadmap for the years ahead – our scientific direction, our investigative priorities, our educational strategy, compliance monitoring program and the steps required to protect clean sport in a world that refuses to stand still.

But tonight is not about strategy. Tonight is about our mission... our purpose.

As we meet here in Busan, it is impossible to ignore the events of the world beyond this conference hall. It is a world that is marked by conflict, division, war, and uncertainty. A world where...too often...mistrust replaces dialogue, and unity feels increasingly fragile.

But even in such a world – especially in such a world – sport remains a source of hope that still brings people together across borders, cultures, and beliefs.

But not just sport – clean, honest, fair sport. Sport that allows every child, in every country, to dream without fear and without compromise.

Sport that reminds us what humanity can be when we choose integrity over ego, respect over division, and effort over shortcuts.

So let us protect that hope.

Let us guard it with courage because the world needs it now more than ever.

Let us protect its value.

Let us defend the dreams born on dusty tracks, in community pools, in small gyms, and on frozen rinks around the world.

Let us stand together – not divided by borders or ideology, but united by responsibility.

And...let us leave this opening ceremony with a shared vow that...no matter how complex the world becomes; no matter how powerful or sophisticated the threats grow; the values of clean sport will endure – because we will ensure that they endure.

Integrity is stronger than deception.

Courage is stronger than shortcuts.

Unity is stronger than ego.

And...the spirit of clean sport – the spirit we honor here in Busan – is stronger than anything that seeks to undermine it.

So tonight, let us join together...

- For the athletes...
- For fairness...
- For every honest step taken on every track, field, court and rink around the world...

And let the world hear clearly, clean sport is well worth fighting for and we will fight for it together! It starts with us!

For every child and athlete who dares to dream – we rise as one.

Thank you.