

Speech by Witold Bańka, WADA President Session 1, World Conference on Doping in Sport Busan, Republic of Korea – 3 December 2025

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests.

We officially opened this Conference yesterday. But it is my honor, on this first full day of our work together, to once again welcome all of you here in Busan – a city where tradition and progress coexist with confidence. Korea's commitment to hosting this Conference for the first time in Asia is a milestone for the global anti-doping movement. We thank the Government, KADA, and the City of Busan for their leadership.

Last month, WADA turned 26. And in those 26 years, global anti-doping has undergone a transformation that few could have predicted in 1999. What was once a fragmented landscape – with different rules, different laws, different expectations – has become a harmonized system built on shared responsibility between governments and the sport movement. Some people doubted the 50–50 model would last. But it has proven to be durable, effective, and indeed essential for the success of the entire global system.

We acknowledge the leaders who guided WADA through defining moments – Richard Pound, the late John Fahey, and Sir Craig Reedie. Their stewardship established the institution and strengthened its credibility.

When I assumed the presidency in 2020, the consequences of Russia's institutionalized doping scheme were still unfolding. Operation LIMS – WADA's investigation into the Moscow Laboratory – exposed the truth, and nearly 300 individuals were ultimately sanctioned. That process reaffirmed a fundamental principle: justice in sport may take time, but it will prevail.

And then came COVID-19 – a global crisis no one anticipated. Yet the anti-doping community adapted with determination and creativity, proving that integrity is resilient, even when sport comes to a standstill.

Today we face new pressures: rapid technological change, expanding financial incentives, and increasing geopolitical tensions. But let me say clearly: the problems in anti-doping do not come from the rules. The World Anti-Doping Code and International Standards are robust and fit for purpose. The challenges arise when the rules are not applied consistently. Where implementation is strong, trust grows. Where it falters, confidence in the system is undermined.

On Friday, we will adopt the revised Code and Standards – the result of two years of global consultation. Its effectiveness will depend not just on the text, but on our collective commitment to enforce it fairly and without hesitation.

Scientific research remains the backbone of everything we do. It shapes the Prohibited List. It strengthens the Athlete Biological Passport. It guides smarter testing strategies. And it allows us to adapt to emerging risks. But the reality is that doping is evolving at an unprecedented speed. Designer substances, microdosing strategies, new gene technologies, a rise in contamination cases, and increasingly sophisticated trafficking networks are reshaping the threat landscape. The financial stakes in sport have never been higher. Nor has the sophistication of those who want to cheat.

If we want to stay ahead, science must move at least as fast as those who seek to undermine fairness. This requires investment. Significant investment. And so today I urge governments, the Olympic Movement, and all partners in clean sport to increase support for anti-doping science. Empower our laboratories. Accelerate

research. Develop the next generation of detection tools. Without decisive action, we risk falling behind forces that do not share our values.

If science helps us detect doping, anti-doping education helps us prevent it – and prevention must be one of our highest priorities. We must ask ourselves an uncomfortable but necessary question: how many cases of doping were not the result of cheating, but rather were unintentional -- due to a lack of education? How many young athletes saw their futures collapse because no one taught them about their rights, their responsibilities, or the risks around them? A decade ago, comprehensive education programs barely existed. Today, WADA views education in its broadest sense. To help prevent intentional and unintentional doping, we carry out social science research that informs our strategy. We have a global Anti-Doping Education and Learning platform (ADEL), which is a comprehensive platform with accessible, multilingual materials for those on the frontline of sport such as athletes, coaches, parents and Anti-Doping Organizations; and, we offer anti-doping skills training via our Global Learning and Development Framework for those working within ADOs. But even with this progress, education remains underfunded and undervalued compared to other areas of the system.

If we truly want to protect athletes – especially the youngest and most vulnerable – we must invest more in education. More outreach. More value-based learning. More guidance for coaches, parents, and medical staff. More tools that help athletes avoid mistakes long before they occur. Education is not an optional extra. It is a must-have. It is the easiest and most effective way to protect athletes and prevent doping.

Alongside education, Intelligence and Investigations has grown steadily in importance. It has become one of WADA's most powerful instruments for uncovering wrongdoing. Since its creation nearly a decade ago, our independent I&I Department has carried out numerous successful investigations – including the landmark Operation LIMS, which set a new global benchmark for uncovering systematic cheating. That investigation alone demonstrated how essential strong investigative capacity is to the credibility of clean sport.

Almost two years ago, we launched a major project in Europe with law enforcement, customs agencies, and National Anti-Doping Organizations. Its outcomes were exceptional... More than 140 joint operations. More than 800 million doses of steroids and other Performance Enhancing Drugs removed from the market. Over 40 tonnes of illegal substances seized. And numerous illegal laboratories shut down. These are not just numbers. They represent safer communities, and they underscore the fact that doping is not only a sports issue – it is a public health and public safety issue.

Our success in Europe has made WADA a stronger partner for Europol, Interpol, and law enforcement agencies worldwide. We have already taken the project to Asia and Oceania. And, by 2029, we will establish a global Intelligence & Investigation network spanning all continents.

But we must also confront a difficult truth. WADA's investigators do not have the tools that are available to law enforcement. They cannot seize or access digital devices. They cannot demand the production of evidence. They cannot use investigative powers that police rely on every day. This limitation becomes even more critical in countries where doping is not a criminal offense. In those jurisdictions, law enforcement cannot act either. This leaves WADA with limited means to investigate even when the need for intervention is clear.

Despite this, our I&I team delivers results that defy these limitations. Imagine what they could achieve if they had all the tools they need.

This is why I respectfully but firmly call on our stakeholders, including governments, to consider expanding – with appropriate safeguards – the investigative capabilities available to WADA's I&I Department. Not to punish

more athletes. Not to overreach. But to close a gap that criminals exploit, and to enable effective investigations where no other authority has the mandate to act.

Legal affairs and compliance monitoring are equally critical to a credible system. When first-instance results management decisions are inconsistent or flawed, athlete confidence suffers. Increasingly, we are observing disciplinary rulings by hearing panels that are not fully aligned with the World Anti-Doping Code. This must change. While WADA cannot appeal every decision, we will do so in more cases where fairness demands it. And we will not hesitate to bring matters before the Court of Arbitration for Sport when the integrity of the system is at stake. The Code and International Standards are strong and fit for purpose – but credibility requires that they be followed. Consistent application of the rules is what builds trust in the system, and it is what athletes deserve.

The time when WADA was responsible for every single sin and sinner in anti-doping is finished.

Code compliance by Anti-Doping Organizations must also improve. Athletes face strict expectations. Institutions must be held to the same high standard. And let us be candid: some systems that present themselves as the most advanced continue to struggle with harmonization and compliance. Leadership is not a claim – it is a practice. This is why we are significantly increasing the number of compliance audits of Anti-Doping Organizations and other stakeholders. And it is why we have already begun publishing more detailed reports. We believe that greater scrutiny and greater transparency will make the system tighter, fairer, and more trustworthy for all athletes.

Another essential element of credibility is independent testing. In some regions, anti-doping has become entangled with politics – disputed jurisdictions, national pressures, and decisions that are influenced by considerations other than evidence. As a result, more and more athletes and sport leaders are calling for greater independence in testing. They are right to expect impartiality. WADA hears these concerns and will act where independent testing is necessary to ensure trust. Credibility depends on neutrality, and neutrality requires independence.

We also stand united against reckless concepts such as the Enhanced Games, which allows for the unregulated use of performance-enhancing substances -- abandoning the very principles that give sport meaning. They are not the future of sport – they are a distortion of it.

In the years ahead, we will face familiar and unfamiliar challenges. As has been the case since 1999, our strength will come from partnership – governments, sports, laboratories, scientists, NADOs, law enforcement agencies, and athletes. All working together with a shared purpose. Anti-doping does not belong to any one country, institution, or personality. It belongs to all of us, from around the world – and ultimately to the athletes who deserve a fair playing field, regardless of where they come from or how well their systems are resourced.

Let us continue to listen.
Let us continue to evolve.
And let us move forward – together.

With the collective resolve, wisdom, and integrity of everyone gathered here, I am convinced that the next chapter of the global anti-doping story will stand as a defining moment. A chapter that renews the moral compass of sport... safeguards the hopes of every young athlete... and preserves for generations to come the dignity, honor, and pure humanity that make sport one of the greatest forces for good in our world.

Thank you.