

**VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT BY WADA PRESIDENT WITOLD BANKA  
WITH MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR SPORT AND SENIOR  
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS OF THE AFRICAN REGION**

**13 OCTOBER 2021**

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Good day Africa!

My dear colleagues, greetings from Warsaw, Poland. As President of the World Anti-Doping Agency, it is my honor to have the opportunity to welcome you to this virtual engagement. I am joined at this meeting by WADA's Vice-President, Yang Yang, Director General, Olivier Niggli, Director of our Africa Office, Rodney Swigelaar, and Senior Director for Stakeholder Engagement and Partnerships, René Bouchard. We are all here to support you and collaborate with you in your anti-doping efforts.

Unfortunately, given the world we live in, we are not able to meet in person today. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt our well-intended plans to ensure we meet with you regularly, face to face. But there is light at the end of the tunnel. So hopefully we will be able to get together again soon.

As mentioned in the invitation letter, this virtual session is the first in a series we will have with the Governments of Africa. Because of the high number of governments in the region (54), and considering the interactive nature of the session, we felt it was better to have smaller groups of countries instead of having everybody on the call at the same time. I hope you will let us know what we can do better for these sessions.

It is a privilege for me as a former Sports and Tourism Minister in the Government of Poland and as a former international level athlete, to head WADA as it fulfils its mission to lead a collaborative worldwide movement for doping-free sport.

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.

It is with this collaborative spirit in mind that we decided to engage with you in discussion. We want to ensure that you are kept up to date on the goings-



on in anti-doping. We want to provide you with crystal clear information on the role and priorities of WADA, our program interventions in support of delivering on our mandate. We will always be open and honest about the challenges we are facing.

More importantly, I wish to hear from you and respond to your questions, comments or concerns. We want to consider the important role African governments play in the anti-doping eco-system and find ways to enhance that contribution.

I would like to touch on three important aspects which will be further discussed during the course of our engagement this afternoon.

**The first** is the need for the anti-doping doping system to be strong. That is, for each country to have a robust 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 that their athletes would never cheat. We must not be naïve – doping can happen anywhere. Sport is a multi-billion-dollar industry and much fame and riches are to be gained by talented athletes. It is therefore imperative that notions of doping “immunity” in certain places be dispelled. The truth is that no country and no sport is immune. We must always be vigilant. If certain countries have so far been spared the disgrace of their athletes, or members of their entourage, breaking anti-doping rules, then efforts should be made to keep it that way. Having strong testing, investigation 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 toll that doping takes on families, societies, national pride and global prestige, it is vitally important to put anti-doping safeguards in place.

On this note I would like to mention that the UNESCO Convention Against Doping in Sport will have its Conference of Parties meeting in Paris later this month. I am sure you have received an invitation already and I urge you to attend this forum where the role of Governments in anti-doping will be discussed. It is important that the African region has a voice at that forum and that strong candidates are selected to represent you there. It is also crucial that you stand strong in ensuring that the Conference of Parties addresses your particular concerns and aspirations. I look forward to seeing many of you there.

At WADA we, too, have resource constraints. As a global regulator we must make every dollar count to ensure we can deliver on our mandate. We do a huge amount with the contributions we receive from the Sport Movement and Governments. But they can only go so far and it should not be up to them to shoulder this responsibility alone. It is for this reason that I



am reaching out for other sources of funding, mainly from the private sector, to supplement what we receive from our traditional resource base.

**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 athletes of the world. To listen to their needs, to understand what frustrates and motivates them; to tune into their considered views and ultimately to take decisions based on that input. I must admit that sometimes it is a balancing act to find common ground among so many different views – but at the end of the day, it is important to listen and hear what athletes expect from the global anti-doping system.

We will continue to ensure that the African 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 Africa, who



are nominated to serve on this body, and they have always been very vocal and astute on matters affecting African athletes, in particular.

Many athletes, including Kenya's Tegla Loroupe and Zimbabwe's Minister of Sport and Olympic gold medalist Kirsty Coventry, have recently served on the Athlete Committee with distinction. Humphrey Kayange from Kenya and Kady Kanouté Tounkara from Mali are still on the Committee today. In fact, Kady is also, currently, the Chair of our Education Committee, a crucial position within WADA's governance.

We are not naïve to believe that the world is homogenous. We are very aware that each continent and each country has its own unique set of challenges and societal nuances.

Africa has always played a significant role in the development of WADA. Many of your predecessors held decisive roles in the establishment and development of WADA. They helped to nurture and support WADA to where and what it is today. We are thankful for that support, which continues, strong



as ever. Thanks to you, Honorable Ministers, we continue to benefit from the wise counsel and passionate activism of your representatives. They serve on our governance structures and provide valuable advice and support to us, both at the management and the political levels.

As I said before, that is the nature of WADA – it is a collaboration, a team effort. Ministers, I look to each of you to be cheerleaders for anti-doping in each of your countries and to ensure that your athletes are protected by a strong program. I need you to be the voice of clean sport in the region.

As part of today's program, we have a dedicated session where you can ask questions of us. I look forward to engaging with you during that session,

Thank you and welcome to this virtual platform.