

Translation

**Speech by Federal Chancellor Merkel
at the UNESCO World Conference of Sport Ministers**

29 May 2013

Berlin

Director-General Bokova,
IPC President Sir Philip Craven,
Minister Friedrich,
Mayor Henkel,
Ministers,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Esteemed guests,

Welcome to Germany for the 5th World Conference of Sport Ministers. For us and our whole country, it is a great pleasure to be your host. On behalf of the entire Federal Government, Minister Friedrich will do all he can to make sure you feel at home in Germany and of course here in the German capital Berlin.

Sport fascinates and grips people and has done so since antiquity. Things are no different today. Just last Saturday, as the Director-General just mentioned, we saw and heard once more that sport speaks a language that is understood all around the world. The final of the UEFA Champions League in London's Wembley Stadium was watched on the television by some 300 million viewers worldwide. They didn't need an interpreter. This proves once more that football is known as the most beautiful triviality in the world – and not just here in Germany.

But is sport actually a triviality? I have my doubts and I'm sure you do too. At the end of the day, identifying with a team or engaging in sport is a central feature of everyday life for countless sports fans. They take the time, even when time is itself a precious resource. They relish in the sense of community in the stadium, sports hall or club. And they cherish values such as team spirit, fairness and tolerance.

Sport brings people together. It develops enormous emotional and social strength. The shared enthusiasm, the shared experience of victory and defeat, the shared joy and suffering – it all forges bonds. Sport crosses borders. It is able to bring together people of different ages and backgrounds, regardless of skin colour, education or religion.

In Germany, sport plays a key role when it comes to integrating migrants. Sport serves as a motor for integration. In many clubs and teams, men and women train together, some with and some without foreign roots. In their team, they form a unit pursuing a shared goal. Competition and companionship require and indeed foster cultural understanding and open-mindedness. This also holds true between nations. Just think of the enthusiasm regularly stirred up by the Olympics and the Paralympics. At the last Summer Olympics, athletes from more than 200 nations took part. In all corners of the world, people huddled together in front of their televisions to watch.

The international significance of sport is ultimately also reflected in the World Conferences of Sport Ministers. Ladies and gentlemen, you have come from some 150 countries to be here in Berlin today to seek answers together – above all to questions concerning major sporting events. Such events are of course a costly undertaking. But they can also provide momentum for the sustainable development of the host city. And above and beyond economic factors, there is also scope for environmental and cultural developments. Just take London and how the whole country managed to present itself. That was one of many good examples of the spin-offs sporting events can have.

Hosting an international sports event is a great honour for a country. In Germany, we have fond memories of the 2006 FIFA World Cup, for example. When it was all over, many countries in the world realized that Germans are actually able to laugh – something that had passed many people by. So through these major events, you often learn something new about the people in the country, something you hadn't known before. Then again, going by the weather back then, you would have thought you were in Brazil. Unfortunately it isn't always like that in Germany. I hope you are lucky. We've had a lot of rain in Berlin recently, so we certainly deserve a couple of sunny days.

As many countries as possible should benefit from the opportunity to present themselves in the best possible light. Major projects do, however, always have high security requirements and it is good this is on the agenda for this World Conference of Sport Ministers.

As I look around at who is here with us from the German Bundestag, I can see they are sports enthusiasts but also people who work on internal security. So let me extend a warm welcome also to the Members of the German Bundestag.

No matter how well organized a sports event is, it draws its lifeblood from sporting heroes. Given their success and their personalities, many of them are role models and people with whom others identify. With their willpower and dedication, they spur on others. The way in which they deal with defeats earns our respect but also our compassion. And when they doggedly continue to train and remain focused on their targets, they encourage each and every one of us. This holds true for sport for people without and people with disabilities.

There have been leaps forward in recent years particularly in sport for the disabled. Today, it is the focus of much more attention and respect which is no more than it deserves given the breathtaking and fantastic performances we have seen. But we still have a way to go. After all, unhindered access to sports grounds and barrier-free facilities are certainly not the norm everywhere. In Germany, we are currently very busy implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and endeavouring to truly live inclusion in our country. It is important that the inclusion issue is on the agenda of your Conference this year.

The aim is always to tap and promote the positive effects of sport and its function of providing role models. And it is plain to see that all our efforts come to naught as soon as the integrity of sporting achievements is called into question. We have seen time and again how quickly fair and honest competition runs into danger when rules are broken systematically or intentionally, when there are manipulation attempts, drug use or corruption. This all causes serious damage to the wonderful image of sport and undermines the very values which sport represents.

For this reason, we have to take a resolute stand against unsporting and criminal activities. Here, too, we need to present a united front. For this reason, an international strategy would be good to get all the right stakeholders on board. And let me send a clear message on behalf of politicians that we must not leave sports organizations on their own with this. They need state support – whether from governments or from parliaments – when it comes to combating the in part considerable criminal energy in the world of sport.

So, I would be delighted if this World Conference of Sport Ministers were to send a clear political signal to draw up preventive steps and possibilities for sanctions together and get

these off the ground. I consider this to be a huge opportunity for sport. So a call goes out to each and every one of us to use this opportunity together.

Even the German scholar Johann Gottfried von Herder knew, and I quote “Those who do not run, will not reach the finishing line.” So I hope all of you are fit enough for the discussions! I am confident that there will be a clear winner at the finishing line – and that will be sport itself. With this in mind, I would like to wish us all a successful conference. I hope you feel at home in Germany, in Berlin. We are glad to have you as our guests. We will do everything to make sure it is a successful conference. Thank you very much.