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**United Nations Plenary for the High Level Meeting on Refugees and Migrants  
Remarks by IOC President Thomas Bach**

**New York, 19 September 2016**

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President,

Excellencies,

The International Olympic Committee fully supports and congratulates the member states and the Secretary General for the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. We welcome the calls for 'civil society to play an important role as a key partner in every region of the world'. We at the IOC stand ready to help with a renewed commitment. The unprecedented scale and magnitude of the global refugee crisis requires a concerted effort by the international community to find long-term solutions for this human tragedy. At the IOC we are developing new plans that will make a real difference to lives of young people around the world.

Everybody needs to do their part because this exceptional situation is a moral challenge and a call to action for all of us. This is why one year ago, the IOC announced at the UN General Assembly the creation of the first-ever Refugee Olympic Team. At the Olympic Games Rio 2016 in August, this team of refugee athletes participated alongside all 11,000 athletes of the world from all 206 National Olympic Committees. They competed not as refugees but like any other Olympic Team. The participation of the Refugee Olympic Team sent a strong message of solidarity and hope to the millions of refugees around the world.

The refugee athletes showed us all that despite the unimaginable tragedies and suffering that they have faced, anyone can contribute to society through their talent, skills and most importantly, through the strength of the human spirit. Their participation in the Olympic Games is proof that refugees are an enrichment to society just as they are an enrichment to our Olympic family. In a great sign of Olympic solidarity, these refugee athletes received an incredible welcome wherever they went in Rio de Janeiro. At the Opening Ceremony they were treated like rock stars with a standing ovation from the enthusiastic crowd. Without the



personal commitment of the UN Secretary General and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees all this great success would not have been possible.

When the Olympic flame was extinguished, it brought the Olympic Games to an end, but the IOC's support for the refugee athletes goes on. We continue by their side beyond the Olympic Games to help them to integrate in their new home countries or to prepare to go back to their countries of origin to contribute to building a better society there.

Like all of us gathered here today, we know that the world needs long-term solutions to address the global refugee crisis. The IOC and the Olympic Movement are built on the belief that sport can contribute to peace and the harmonious development of humankind. Our mission is to put sport at the service of humanity. Sport is a natural partner when it comes to realising the goals for social and economic progress of the international community. The historic 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development specifically recognises sport as an "important enabler" to promote peace and understanding. The IOC wholeheartedly supports the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals and is honoured to join hands with the UN and its Member States to work together for a better world. Sport can also be an 'important enabler' to deliver the goals of inclusion for refugees and migrants.

Today, I reiterate our commitment to the international community that we will support the important efforts of the UN and all governments to find sustainable solutions to the refugee crisis. In light of the New York Declaration we want to strengthen this cooperation with a very concrete proposal.

We come with a commitment from the IOC to work to build 'safe places' for children to play sport throughout the world. In cities where there is a displaced migrant population, in our refugee camps or wherever in the world it is needed – sport can become the glue which will bind communities together. It can break down cultural and gender barriers in a safe environment promoting social cohesion peace and equality. In short, these 'safe places through sport' will be easily adaptable to local areas of need in any given country. They can not only provide a platform for all the benefits that sport can bring but also create better opportunities for other civil society actors to do their job, whether it be to provide education or health services. It places sport at the very heart of public policy. In this way sport can play its part in making the world a better place.



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We will continue to strengthen our cooperation with UNHCR. Through our IOC Honorary President Jacques Rogge, who is also the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General for Youth Refugees and Sport, we will continue to support healing and development among young refugees in many camps around the world. We will build on our 20 years of partnership with the UNHCR to provide humanitarian assistance through sport to refugees.

We do this because sport can heal wounds. Sport has the power to bring people together no matter what their background or where they come from. Sport always builds bridges, it never erects walls. Above all, sport brings hope. As a committed partner to the United Nations and all its Member States, the IOC stands ready to support the efforts of the international community to bring hope to all refugees.