

IOC against any protest

from Guy Sahri ©

The Commission of the Athletes of the International Olympic Committee – IOC decided Thursday April 17, 2008 against any demonstration of protest at the time of next the Olympic Games of Beijing, organized by China, disparaged concerning its policy of the human rights. The Commission declared itself against any manifestation of the athletes, whether it be the simple port of a badge on so for possible boycotting of the opening ceremony of the Games, whose kickoff will be given on August 8, 2008 in the Chinese Capital. « *We respect their independence, those of the athletes and their right to express itself, but we are not ready to sacrifice the enclosures of the Olympic Games for this right!!* », declared Mr. Bob Csertlik, American member of IOC and President United State Olympic Committee – USOC. This Commission of IOC which is formed with many ex-medal-holders of Olympic Gold, estimates that the athletes must submit to Olympic Charter which banished the demonstrations. At the time of the passage of Olympic Flame in France, many athletes had carried a badge indicating « *For a better world* ». China is disparaged for its policy as regards the human rights, the repression of the riots in Tibet and its complicity with Sudan condemned by the international community for the events in Darfur. « *We saw that some wanted to use the athletes with fine policies. Our force is to remain out of the political stakes* », declared Mr. Sergeï Bubka, President of the Commission of the Athletes of IOC. « *There are many conflicts in the world. If you let them penetrate in the Olympic enclosures, you can destroy the movement...* ».

Mr. Sergeï Bubka, ex-champion Olympic pole vaulting champion and President Athletes' Commission IOC, said that he never received any better of athlete asserting the right to protest. However Mr. David Douillet, the double French Olympic champion of Judo and President Athletes' Commission of CNOSF, suggested that in China the athletes should wear the badge « *For a better world* ». Mr. Sergeï Bubka indicates that he told Mr. David Douillet to benefit from Athletes' Commission meeting. « *Until now, we received any letter, no request* », said Mr. Sergeï Bubka. « *This badge is clearly political. It is not acceptable. As athletes we must contribute with the rules and to accept them* At this meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland, the 20 Members of the Athletes' Commission within the International Olympic Committee discussed the difficult international context surrounding the Olympic Games for a few weeks and the way of facing up. Were present:

Sergeï Bubka (Athletics), Lee Kyung Chun (Short track speed skating), Robert Ctvrtlik (Volleyball), Yaping Deng (Table Tennis), Rania Amr Elwani (Swimming), Frank Fredericks (Athletics), Hicham El Guerrouj (Athletics), Barbara Kendall (Sailing), Ljiljana Ljubisic (Athletics), Mireya Luiz Hernandez (Beach Volleyball), Alexander Popov (Swimming), Peter Tallberg (Sailing), Pernilla Wiberg (Alpine skiing), HRH Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein (Equestrian), Charmaine Crooks (Athletics), HSH Prince Albert II (Bobsleigh), Manuela Di Centa (Cross country skiing), Saku Koivu (Ice hockey), Rebecca Scott (Cross country skiing), Jan Zelezny (Athletics).

With their experience, members of the Athletes' Commission expressed passionately the importance of improper handling of athletes and their use for political purposes. They unanimously defended of Article 51.3 of the Olympic Charter saying that « *any kind of demonstration or political propaganda, religious or racial is permitted in one place, site or other Olympic site* ». Close of the meeting, the following statement was made public:

« In 2001, the International Olympic Committee voted to award the Olympic Games in 2008 to Beijing, China. We believe the rationale for that choice – that the bid was the best one, technically excellent and that the Games should be brought to a country where one fifth of the world lives – was

a sound rationale then, and remains sound today. Indeed, some of our Commission members were members of the IOC at the time and fully supported the choice of Beijing and still do.

The Olympic Games are an event that allow athletes from across the globe to show us a world as it can be when people come together peacefully to celebrate their commonality rather than focus on their differences. We believe firmly that sport has, over the past seven years of Games preparation, served as an entry point to allow a growing understanding between China and the world and vice versa. Of particular note is that in the past weeks three World Championships, which by the way are also the test events for the Olympic Games, have been staged smoothly and successfully. There can be no better way to encourage China's change and celebrate the positive steps already taken, than to engage through sport. And no better way than through the Olympic Games, watched by billions around the world, and millions who will come to Beijing.

We are all of the wholehearted belief that boycotts are pointless and senseless – and only hurt the athletes. Some of us know this through bitter, personal experience. Others know it through our friends. We are heartened by the fact that the futility of boycotts is recognised by the majority of governments and organisations around the world. We note, however, that in some quarters there are those who chose to play with the idea of boycotting the Opening Ceremony. On this point, we would like to stress that for each of us individually, parading for our country at the Opening Ceremony was a key moment of pride, the memories of which we remember fondly today; athletes who have this opportunity ahead of them will doubtless recognise how special this moment will be for them. The Olympic ceremonies, like the Games, are for the athletes; it is for the athletes that the crowd in the stadium cheers and the supporters watch on TV screens around the world. Having heads of state, government and sports ministers alongside the general public in the stadium is a sign of support for their athletes.

Athletes have a right to express themselves, and plenty of opportunity to do so ahead of and during the Games. Typically, however, they are focused on how to achieve sporting success. They have trained years for their moment and deserve to experience it without being burdened with geopolitical issues – no matter how important those issues might be. Athletes from 205 different countries and territories compete against each other at the Olympic Games. This is why our event has regulations in place to discourage its politicisation. With so many issues and conflicts in our world, if we allow our event to be the place to raise them, this would change the essence of what we are there to do – to compete athlete against athlete in a spirit of respect, friendship and fair play. Athletes have the right not to express themselves – and certainly the right not to feel obliged to do so. It is normal that the majority of athletes will simply want to be allowed to focus on their preparations and their competitions. We support and defend them in this right.

With only three months left until the Olympic Games, we are excited and eager for the start of the event. The Torch Relay, which heralds the Games, and symbolises our values and dreams, has not had the peaceful passage it deserves. We are truly saddened by this. Violent protests around the Olympic torch are totally counter to the values the torch stands for. The torch, which does not belong to any country but rather to the world, represents Olympic values – nothing else, and should be allowed to pass peacefully. We do not want to see it mistreated nor exploited.

As National Olympic Committees make the final selections for the teams they will field in Beijing, we would like to wish athletes around the world the best of luck in the final qualification processes. This is your moment to shine on a world stage, to enjoy the experience and to know that you will be part of history. We can tell you from our experience that you will be warmly welcomed in Beijing by the Chinese people. We can also reassure you that the Organising Committee is paying the necessary attention to managing the air quality and that your health is of great importance to it. We believe today, as much as we did back in 2001, that Beijing 2008 will be a great success, giving Beijing and China the opportunity of a positive legacy they can manage and sustain. We, your representatives,

along with your National Federation, your National Olympic Committee, and of course the International Olympic Committee are here to guide and advise you. Good luck! ».

In addition, International Olympic Committee – IOC also denounces manifestations blocking the course of the Olympic flame in Paris, France. Mr. Richard Kevan Gosper, Vice Chairman of the Commission of IOC considered the Games organizers « *Enormously made effort to organize one of the greatest Games of all times, but that professional disturbers do not consider that. They are just promoted by hatred and resentment. These organized manifestations are an offense against Olympic torch, symbol of goodwill, peace, comprehension and excellence in the sport* ». Since April 7, 2008 the Olympic flame was jostled. « *One day after London, the stage in Paris finished in state of confusion, joke and, finally, cancellation* », considers the American newspaper, « The Independent ». « *The flame was shamefully carried through the streets of the City of Light in a Police van (...). Instead of celebrating emergence of China like a world power, the stage of the flame turned into way of shame* », the newspaper continues, concluding that we are witness to the « *more important international manifestations against Chinese violations of human rights since student massacres in Tiananmen* ».

Meanwhile Olympic flame continues on its way. To be continued...