The Role of the National Olympic Committees in the propagation of the Olympic Idea *

by the Dr. P. Ritter,
President of National Olympic Committee of Liechtenstein

I shall try to outline the duties of the NOCs and then I wish to speak about the measures to be taken by the IOC in order to accomplish these duties within the scope of the Olympic Movement.

In this address, I shall not talk exclusively about the duties of the NOCs, but also on its necessities, which, as we are going to see, must be met so that every NOC can actually accomplish its duties. We then consider some important questions concerning today’s Olympic Movement as well as its organisation and its structure.

Every enterprise, every organisation needs a clear and expressive target in order to accomplish its duties. First, this target is reflected in partial targets, then in the organisation of the enterprise and its different departments. The enterprise only reaches its target if each department of the entirety wants to get there and if the organisation helps the department accordingly. For the Olympic Movement, this target certainly is the human being. All faculties and not simply those of a sporting nature, of an individual have to be promoted in an optimal way.

The target of the Olympic Movement, however, is more than promoting a sportsman from a particular country or continent. The Olympic Movement wants to be a world-wide organisation. It seems to me that this last point within the scope of the general targets is the most difficult task—this is also true with respect to my speech. I therefore want to concentrate on this partial aspect of the aims of the Olympic Movement. These are described in Rule one, as follows:

“The aims of the Olympic Movement are:

- to promote the development of those physical and moral qualities which are the basis of sport,
- to educate young people through sport in a spirit of better understanding between each other and of friendship, thereby helping to build a better and more peaceful world,
- to spread the Olympic principles throughout the world, thereby creating international goodwill,
- to bring together the athletes of the world in the great four yearly sport-festival, the Olympic Games”.

The IOC has been entrusted by the Olympic Charter with the implementation of these aims. This body has the following tasks:

- to encourage the organisation and development of sport and sports competitions;
- to inspire and lead sport within the Olympic ideal, thereby promoting and strengthening friendship between the sportsmen of all countries;
- to ensure the regular celebration of the Olympic Games;
- to make the Olympic Games even more worthy of their glorious history and of the high ideals which inspired their revival by Baron Pierre de Coubertin and his associates.

That is to say, the IOC is in charge of the general running of the Olympic Movement, internationally.

According to Rule 24, the NOCs are called upon to further the Olympic ideals and the Olympic Movement on a national level. In Rule 24 b. the objects of the NOCs are defined as follows:

“The object of NOCs, in accordance with the fundamental principles contained in these Rules, shall be to ensure the development and safeguarding of the Olympic Movement and sport. NOCs shall be the sole authorities responsible for the representation of their respective countries at the Olympic Games as well as at other events held under the patronage of the IOC, and to see that ar-
rangements are made for the organisation of the Games of the Olympiad and the Winter Games and the other events mentioned above when they are held in their own country. The IOC may help the NOCs to fulfil their mission through the Olympic Solidarity programme.”

This somehow vague definition of the duties of the NOCs needs to be clarified and in my opinion it has been done in the model constitution for NOCs published by the IOC. The duties of the NOCs can be clearly deduced from a study of both documents. Permit me, therefore, to outline the essential provisions of this model constitution.

Article 2.1
“The general object of the Olympic Committees is the fostering and the development of the Olympic Movement and its high ideals throughout the country; based principally on the provisions laid down in this constitution…”

b) “Objectives of the Olympic Movement:
The Olympic Games were not revived by Baron Pierre de Coubertin merely to give contestants a chance to win medals and to break records, nor to entertain the public, nor to provide for the participants a stepping stone to a career in professional sport, nor certainly to demonstrate the superiority of one political system over another.

His idea was that they would:
1. bring to the attention of the world the fact that a national programme of physical training and competitive sport will not only develop stronger and healthier boys and girls but also, and perhaps more important, will make better and happier citizens through the character building that follows participation in properly administrated amateur sport.
demonstrate the principles of fair play and good sportsmanship, which could be adopted with great advantage in many other spheres of activity.
stimulate interest in the fine arts through exhibitions and demonstrations, and thus contribute to a broader and more well-rounded life.
teach that sport is play for fun and enjoyment and not to make money, and that with devotion to the task at hand, the reward will take care of itself. The philosophy of the amateur is contrasted to that of materialism.
5. create international amity and good will, thus leading to a happier and more peaceful world.
A further duty of the National Olympic Committee is defined under Article 2.1.e as follows:
“The Olympic Committee will encourage the development of Olympic spirit among the youth of this country and will promote a program of education for the public and the press on the philosophy of amateurism. The Olympic Committee will keep in mind not to concentrate too much on performance and new records but more the social, educational, aesthetic, ethical and spiritual values of amateur sports”.

Article 2.2 states:
“This Olympic Committee has as its purpose the development and protection of the Olympic Movement and of amateur sport. It shall co-operate with the national amateur sport governing bodies (national federations) affiliated to the International Federations recognised by the International Olympic Committee in guarding and enforcing amateur rules.
And, finally, point 5 of the same article states:
“This Olympic Committee is not formed for pecuniary profit, but is devoted to the promotion and the encouragement of the physical, moral and cultural education of the youth of our nation, for the development of character, good health and good citizenship.”

These are roughly the targets of the Olympic Movement, of the IOCs and NOCs. But what does the situation look like in practice? What aims have we reached already and how are we going to reach the rest of the aims within the NOCs?
What kind of help do we get from the IOC? What kind of help do we need most urgently?
Let me start with point 1: the objectives of the Olympic Movement:
Through its activities, the NOC is to show not only that the physical qualities of the boys and girls have increased, but that they have become better and happier citizens of the nation.
This objective for every NOC, however, requires a variety of fundamentals that first have to be provided. But which fundamentals and from whom do they have to be provided?
As already mentioned, the task of the IOC is to determine, world-wide, the physical and moral qualities of sport; has this task been completed, are these qualities determined
and is the individual NOC in a position to promote them and make them known? Are the Olympic Games, whose purpose is the presentation of these qualities, appropriate in their present form?

After all, is this sport movement of the present time a demonstration of these values?

A lot of questions that can be answered only partially. Nevertheless, we have to try to reach the set objective, the set ideal. It seems to me that this task becomes more and more important for the NOCs. But then, we have to ask ourselves if there is a possibility at all. We also have to consider the different starting positions that are met in the different countries. We have to furnish the necessary modesty to follow these general objectives over a long period of time. Fair play is the principle of the Olympic Movement.

To me, the aim of the Olympic Movement is clear if I think of it as a direction to follow, a path on which this ideal can be developed. A path that can be trodden by every NOC, by every nation and where the milestones of success are apparent. No society can ever reach its aim completely, but all can come closer to the set aim.

Every NOC therefore has to localise the milestone it has reached on its way to the ultimate aim and then go for the next milestone.

On this road, however, every Olympic Committee needs the help of the IOC and the other NOCs. For all of us, it becomes much easier to cover the distance from one milestone to the other if we know about the experience of the others—our ideals. In my opinion this exchange of experiences is the true task of Olympic Solidarity. Finally, this Olympic Solidarity should also bring the possibility for every Olympic Committee to enjoy its success.

The main task of every NOC is to localise its position. After that it will also be able to work out new partial objectives for both itself and the society. This leads to other tasks which differ in each society.

Let me mention the basic values for the determination on the task:

- What level of cultural development has been reached by the individual nation and society?
- What is the predominant religion?
- What level civilisation has been reached by the individual nation?
- What kind of economy predominates? The agrarian, the industrial or even the third or fourth sector?
What kind of area is predominant? Rural, urban or even metropolitan areas?

What possibilities exist for spare time activities? Here, special attention has to be paid to the geographical and atmospheric conditions of the country.

Before planning the individual measures, these questions have to be answered. The measures themselves will concern mostly physical education, for every NOC has to concentrate on the society of its country. The performance of the individual sportsman representing his country is, in my judgement, secondary.

The measures to be taken are more or less the same for every Olympic Committee.

Every National Olympic Committee is obliged to solve the educational task of balancing body and spirit, for only a healthy body can house a healthy spirit.

The individual measures are therefore to be taken having regard to the society as a whole. A farmer needs different physical compensation than an industrial worker, or even an employee or townsman.

The individual form of sport that has to be developed shall be chosen with regard to the national interests, and geographical and atmospheric conditions.

Both the sport and the educational aspects have to keep pace with the development of the society. Therefore, the promotion of every form of sport has to follow an overall educational policy. This is why the NOCs should not aim at one particular top performance in one particular form of sport. The much broader effect of the educational purpose, through the different forms of sport, must be considered. It therefore has to be decided what aim should be pursued when promoting the individual forms of sport, be they individual or team sports. It seems that with regard to the society, the team forms of sport should be promoted in order to bring the people together and to form new groups. Especially when dealing with a society that stands at the threshold of industrialisation, the promotion of team sport seems to be very important, for a lot of people have to acquire new methods of living and working and adopt a new human attitude with regard to interhuman relationships. The better this new kind of community is achieved, the more individual sports have to be promoted.

It therefore should be the task of every NOC to be concerned about new sport facilities as soon as a new industrial plant has been built. The NOC should then take care of the individual groups of the society with regard to this form of sport.

But let us never forget the target of our sports promotion. It is the human being and the human community. We have to attach more importance to the whole development of the human being and we have to recognise that the time during which a young man can score top performances in sport is very limited. We are therefore also obliged to organise the time following this short period. Only then will we have completed an important task of the Olympic idea.

At the beginning of my speech I mentioned the organisational structure of the Olympic movement. In this organisational structure the NOCs are, to some extent, the Executive Committees of the IOC. But in order to fulfill their duties, they need absolutely the active support of the IOC, especially regarding the following areas:

1. The continuous adaptation of the Olympic idea to the development of mankind;
2. the constant information and advice by the IOC and the exchange of experiences with other NOCs;
3. the constant development of education of NOC executives by the IOC and its commissions;
4. the guarantee of the financial independence of the NOCs through the support of the IOC.

These demands, however, call for the cooperation of the individual NOCs, that is, the IOC has to be informed of the requirements and intentions of every NOC. Therefore, the NOCs have to increase their cooperation with the IOC in order to participate in the further development of the Olympic Movement. But these latter demands—which seem obvious to me—require a new understanding of the duties of the individual bodies within the Olympic Movement. They especially call for a new self-understanding of the National Olympic Committee. This will come automatically as soon as there are clear targets and when persons that really want to reach these targets work in the NOCs. But all this also requires a change of attitude on the part of the IOC towards the NOCs and only the NOCs, as the active partner, can generate such a change. Finally, a modified organisational structure within the NOCs will also be necessary.