
**Speech by WADA President, Witold Bańka
142nd International Olympic Committee Session**

Wednesday, 24 July 2024, Paris, France

Dear IOC President Thomas Bach, IOC Vice-Presidents, IOC Executive Board Members, IOC Members, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you all very much for your warm welcome and the opportunity to address the IOC Session once again. It is great to be here in Paris for this global celebration of sport. Over the past months and years, we at WADA have been working with our anti-doping partners around the world to make sure everyone is ready. Our focus has been that the Olympic and Paralympic Games are protected and that athletes are afforded the level playing field that they deserve.

In March 2024, we issued a joint communication with the International Testing Agency. This detailed how we have been collaborating with the global anti-doping community to ensure all athletes likely to participate in Paris are properly prepared in advance of the competition.

Late last year, the ITA appointed a Paris 2024 pre-Games Expert Group to support this work – by addressing potential gaps and issuing testing recommendations to all relevant Anti-Doping Organizations around the world. For the first time, the ITA also appointed a Supervisory Panel to support and monitor the work of the Expert Group. WADA holds a position on that panel.

The latest available figures show that 87,000 samples were collected between the beginning of March and the end of June 2024 by 191 Anti-Doping Organizations (in summer Olympic sports). This represents a huge effort on the part of International Federations and National and Regional Anti-Doping Organizations. WADA thanks the ITA, and all ADOs for their ongoing commitment, flexibility and determination to deliver a quality testing program. A few weeks ago, WADA reached out to all Anti-Doping Organizations, urging them to make the most of the remaining time to ensure that all athletes bound for Paris were properly educated and tested. And, that all the testing recommendations that they received from the Pre-Games Expert Group were implemented.

As always, WADA has an Independent Observer team present here in Paris to monitor the anti-doping activities of the Olympic Games. The team is working in partnership with the ITA and the organizing committee to ensure the most effective anti-doping program is delivered. In the same way, we will also have an Independent Observer team at the Paralympic Games, in partnership with the International Paralympic Committee.

We have also been working hard with the WADA-accredited laboratory here to ensure it is ready for the challenge that awaits.

And, as has been customary at various major events since 2001, our Athlete Engagement teams will be stationed in the Athlete Village delivering our 'One Play True Team' campaign. This aims to raise awareness and understanding among athletes and entourage of their roles and responsibilities connected to doping-free sport.

I would like now to address the issue of the Chinese Anti-Doping Agency's no-fault contamination case involving 23 swimmers that continues to feature in some western media, particularly in the United States. In the days after the story first emerged in April, and to reassure the athlete community, WADA appointed an Independent Prosecutor, Eric Cottier, to review WADA's handling of the case. We did so because of serious allegations that were being leveled against us of a coverup and bias towards China, again mainly in the United States.

As you may have seen, on 9 July, the Independent Prosecutor delivered his interim report. His conclusions could not be any clearer:

1. That WADA did not show any bias towards China, undue interference or other impropriety in its assessment of the Chinese Anti-Doping Agency's decision not to bring forward anti-doping rule violations; and
2. That WADA's decision not to appeal the cases to the Court of Arbitration for Sport was indisputably reasonable, based on the evidence.

Ladies and gentlemen, WADA's reputation was being attacked with outrageous and politically motivated allegations. It was important to address these allegations quickly and decisively before the Paris Games. Which we have now done.

While we have always been confident in how we handled this case with the usual skepticism, we welcome this validation by the Independent Prosecutor. Whereas the Prosecutor has made clear that his conclusions will not change, he will issue a final and more detailed report in the coming weeks. We look forward to studying that report at greater length with our Executive Committee in September. It will contain recommendations aimed at strengthening the global anti-doping system. We will consider these as part of the World Anti-Doping Code and International Standards stakeholder update that is currently underway. It is important to remind people that these rules are not WADA's rules. The World Anti-Doping Code has been developed in consultation with, and accepted by, the global anti-doping community over 25 years.

Since Mr. Cottier delivered his interim report, we have appreciated the unequivocal support from the Sport Movement. President Bach, I am grateful for your clear and public endorsement. It is worth noting, also, that we have received messages of support from National Anti-Doping Organizations and governments of the world.

Last week, the Anti-Doping Audit Review Committee of World Aquatics that reviewed this case also found no evidence of “irregularities, mismanagement or cover-up”.

It is therefore, all the more disappointing to hear the same rhetoric from the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency – USADA – doubling down on their defamatory allegations against WADA and World Aquatics. This has been extremely damaging to our reputations and to the confidence and trust that athletes and other stakeholders have in the global anti-doping system.

Despite WADA's public explanations as to how it handled this case and despite the unambiguous conclusions of the Independent Prosecutor's report, we have information that the United States Department of Justice has opened an investigation into this case under the controversial Rodchenkov Anti-Doping Act, which was signed into law in 2020. This law claims jurisdiction for the U.S. in doping-related matters anywhere in the world. I know this investigation is something that alarms many of you, too. Indeed, the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations and the Winter Olympic Federations recently issued strong statements condemning this investigation and what it implies. To be clear, the tests in this case were conducted exclusively on Chinese athletes... at a domestic swimming meet in China... by the National Anti-Doping Organization of that country... under the terms of the World Anti-Doping Code. Not only were there no American athletes at this event but there was no international swimming meet scheduled to take place in the six months after it.

USADA has said that the Rodchenkov Act was introduced “*because WADA could not be trusted to be a strong, fair global watchdog*”. Although clearly wrong in its portrayal of WADA, this shows how USADA sees this law. As a tool for USADA to put itself above the rest of the world, perhaps even to replace WADA as the global regulator for anti-doping. This cannot be allowed to stand. If the U.S. authorities assert jurisdiction over cases that have nothing to do with them, it risks putting the U.S. outside the global anti-doping system. But the need for anti-doping rules to be consistent and to be applied non-politically is why WADA was founded in the first place. It is why we have a World Anti-Doping Code. If the U.S., encouraged by USADA, continues to threaten that harmonization, it will isolate itself from the global sporting community and carry significant consequences for American sport. With your support, in keeping with what we heard this morning during the discussion, WADA will continue to work with all constructive partners in the U.S. to address this situation. We stand ready to work with the U.S Government and based on what we heard this morning from the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee we count on their full support and help in the U.S. for the good of all athletes – to ensure that the U.S. are an integral part of the harmonized system.

To be clear, many elite U.S. athletes, including those here this week, compete under the protection of the Code and are staunch clean sport advocates. The uncomfortable truth however for USADA is that it is failing to address a significant problem, which is that 90% of American athletes compete outside the protection of the Code. I am talking about the professional leagues and collegiate sports. According to figures released on 10 July by the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, 75% of U.S. athletes that are becoming elite athletes and are competing at the international level come through the collegiate system – including the NCAA. This means that the majority of elite U.S. athletes are initially coming from a system that operates outside of the globally recognized clean sport standard. Nothing is being done by USADA to address this serious issue. This is rightly very concerning for WADA and our stakeholders. In fact, we recently received a letter from 32 National and Regional Anti-Doping Organizations in Europe, Africa and Asia asking why some pro leagues and colleges are not bound by the Code. Meanwhile, we know through our collaborations with law enforcement agencies in Europe and other parts of the world that the U.S. is a huge market for the sale and distribution of performance-enhancing drugs. This is a societal issue as well as a sporting one and it is certainly not up to one organization to address it. We must all agree to come together, to collaborate and find solutions for improvement. We owe this to all American athletes and, in particular, to the young athletes coming through the college system.

Despite all the challenges we face, I remain very optimistic for sport and for anti-doping. WADA has continued to cement its place in the global sports landscape. This is due in large part to our 2020-2024 Strategic Plan that places athletes at the center of everything we do. It is also due to major governance reforms that have resulted in a shift towards greater independence and more representation for athletes. We continue to deliver solid results for athletes in all areas of anti-doping. This includes intelligence and investigations, with a particular highlight being the remarkable success story of our European Union-funded project that has strengthened I&I capability across 48 countries. The result has been to remove potentially harmful drugs from circulation with the associated health benefits that this brings and to hopefully reduce the prevalence of doping in Europe. We are talking about 85 joint-operations between National Anti-Doping Organizations and law enforcement agencies, including customs; dozens of illicit laboratories dismantled; many arrests made by police, many Anti-Doping Rule Violations pending; more than 20 tons of prohibited substances intercepted and seized, which equates to an estimated 288 million doses of drugs.

In addition to this, we have also been pushing forward in the crucial areas of athlete engagement, education, science and medicine, compliance monitoring and much, much more.

The global anti-doping system becomes increasingly robust every year, which is due to the strong collaborations that we have with key stakeholders, such as the IOC and the whole sport movement. The teamwork involved in preparing for the Paris Games is proof of this.

As we know, sport has the power to build bridges, to transcend politics and to make a real difference in people's lives. If the will is there -- and if we can keep it from being politicized -- then together, we can improve the system for everyone.

Thank you all for your efforts and commitment to clean sport. Here's to enjoying a wonderful festival of sport that will unfold before us in this iconic City of Lights.