

## London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

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## **THE RIGHT HONOURABLE MICHAËLLE JEAN, *GRAND TÉMOIN DE LA FRANCOPHONIE* FOR THE LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES**

On April 20<sup>th</sup> 2011, Abdou Diouf, Secretary General of La Francophonie, appointed the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, UNESCO Special Envoy for Haiti and former Governor General of Canada, as *Grand Témoin de la Francophonie* for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Aware of her commitment to la Francophonie, the Secretary General has asked her to observe the use of the French language during the upcoming Olympic and Paralympic Summer Games, which will be held in London in 2012. She will also promote the use of French at the Games by establishing high-level contacts with the British authorities, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the London Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) and representatives from the member states of La Francophonie. *"It seemed only natural to entrust this mission to Ms. Jean, given her commitment to La Francophonie. But more importantly, she fits perfectly with our approach to cultural and linguistic diversity and has excellent knowledge of the countries of the French-speaking world,"* said Abdou Diouf.

The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean succeeds former President of the Swiss Confederation, Pascal Couchepin (Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics), French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin (Beijing 2008 Olympics), Ms. Lise Bissonnette (Turin 2006 Olympics) and Mr. Hervé Bourges (Athens 2004 Olympics). Michaëlle Jean is UNESCO Special Envoy for Haiti and was Governor General of Canada from 2005 to 2010. As Governor General of Canada, she also presided over the official ceremonies of the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics, alongside Jacques Rogge and John Furlong. The mission entrusted to her is based on the need to respect Rule 24 of the Olympic Charter, which gives French its status as an official language of the Olympic Games. Her mission follows on from the actions initiated by the Secretary General of *La Francophonie* to address this issue within a multilateral framework and in close collaboration with the International Olympic Committee.

While visiting London for a working session with the Commonwealth Secretary General on 24<sup>th</sup> February, Abdou Diouf met with Sebastian Coe, Chair of the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG), to inform him of the mission of the *Grand Témoin* at the Olympics and to discuss the preparations for the London Games.

## **ATHENS 1896 – LONDON 2012, THE OLYMPIC GAMES ARE STILL IN FRENCH**

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**The Olympic and Paralympic Games provide an opportunity to consolidate the place of the French language at the Olympics as the native language of the modern Games. As such, it combats linguistic uniformity on the international scene and promotes cultural diversity. The status of the French language was consolidated at the Games in Athens 2004, Turin 2006, Beijing 2008 and Vancouver 2010. The London Games must represent a new period of openness, exchange and respect between people, reflecting these values that are so dear to both the Olympic movement and *La Francophonie*.**

The Olympic Charter is unequivocal about the status of the French language. Rule 24 stipulates that: “*the official languages of the International Olympic Committee are French and English*”; and adds: “*in the case of divergence ... French shall prevail*”. These two major international languages were given parity by the founders of the modern Olympic Games from the very start - a decision of great significance in view of the Olympic vocation to promote openness and dialogue between peoples, notably by guaranteeing linguistic and cultural diversity.

A hundred years later, with globalisation tending to put the Anglo-Saxon language and cultures in a dominant position, respecting this objective is still just as important, and fostering linguistic diversity is ever more vital in the struggle against uniformity. In this context, the impact of an event like the Olympic Games is tremendous. The Games are a strategic and symbolic forum through which a universal message of mutual respect between cultures and languages is conveyed to the entire international community, and an appeal for dialogue is made.

French is an international language shared by 75 States and governments around the world. It is indispensable to the National Olympic Committees of these countries and to the thousands of athletes, journalists and French-speaking visitors taking part in various degrees in the London Games.

### **French and English, for perfectly bilingual Games**

At the initiative of Mr. Abdou Diouf, Secretary General of *La Francophonie*, efforts to promote the use and visibility of the French language at the previous Vancouver Games reached a new landmark. The convention signed between the International Organisation of La Francophonie (IOF) and the Vancouver Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (VANOC) on August 14<sup>th</sup> 2009 by Pascal Couchepin, *Grand Témoin de la Francophonie* and John Furlong, VANOC CEO, specified the areas in which the French language must be used, in compliance with Rule 24 of the Olympic Charter.

It consolidated efforts by VANOC and its partners to ensure perfectly bilingual Games in a country where French and English are the national languages. For the first time, this function was extended to the Paralympic Games.

## OLYMPISM AND LA FRANCOPHONIE: SHARED VALUES

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Olympism and La Francophonie have much more in common than the French language. Indeed, both movements share many values and ideals. For their founder, the vocation of the Olympic Games was to use sport to help build peace in the world. By uniting French-speaking people from all over the world around a common language, the francophone movement shares the same objective. It too seeks to facilitate exchanges and understanding between people by fostering the expression of cultural diversity in the service of peace.

The International Organisation of La Francophonie's logo, a five-coloured ring representing the universal character of a linguistic community united in its diversity, is very similar to the five interlacing rings on the Olympic flag, representing the five continents. The similarity shows how close the philosophy of the Olympics and the IOF are. There is good reason for this. French, *langue des Lumières*, or the language of the Enlightenment, is closely associated with values such as democracy, human rights, humanism, peace, solidarity and respect, for which it is the vehicle worldwide. Consequently, the choice of French as one of the two official languages of the IOC has special significance: the French language, more than any other, reflects the Olympic message.

The Games are not a simple international competition governed by rules. They are organised according to the principles set out in the Olympic Charter, another similarity with *La Francophonie* whose aims are also set out in a solemn text of this sort.

### Olympic Charter, Languages, Rule 24

"1. The official languages of the IOC are French and English. 2. Simultaneous interpretation into German, Spanish, Russian and Arabic must also be provided. 3. In the case of divergence between French and English texts of the Olympic charter and all other IOC documents, the French text shall prevail unless expressly provided otherwise in writing".

### Olympic Charter, Fundamental Principles, Article 1

"Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sports with culture, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental principles."

### Charter of *La Francophonie*, «Objectives» Clause 1, Article 1

"Aware of the links between its members through their shared language and in hope of using these links to serve peace, cooperation, solidarity and sustainable development, the aim of the International Organisation of La Francophonie is: to assist the introduction and development of democracy, to help conflict prevention, handling and resolution, to support the rule of law and uphold human rights; to increase dialogue between cultures and civilizations; to bring together peoples through mutual knowledge and to increase solidarity through projects of multilateral cooperation for economic development and to promote education and training."

## **PROMOTING THE FRENCH LANGUAGE, A STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE FOR *LA FRANCOPHONIE***

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**The promotion of the French language on the international scene is one of the International Organisation of La Francophonie's (IOF) strategic objectives.**

**French is an international language** given its status and use as an official and working language in international organisations, European and African institutions and major international cultural and sports events. In order to combat the perverse effects of globalisation on languages and in an effort to preserve linguistic diversity throughout the world, the IOF has implemented a scheme to preserve the French language's status as an international language and increase its presence.

### **LA FRANCOPHONIE AT THE SERVICE OF PEACE**

The IOF's 75 member states and governments, 56 members and 19 observers, together represent over 890 million people, 220 million of whom speak French regularly, with varying degrees of fluency.

The cohesion and originality of the French-speaking community is derived from the fact that it shares this common language. The French language is a preferred means of oral and written communication that is kept alive and developed both in the French-speaking world and internationally.

The IOF respects cultural and linguistic diversity and promotes multilingualism in the French-speaking world through the equal treatment of partner languages coexisting alongside French. It forges alliances and sets up synergies with large international linguistic areas as such as the Spanish, Portuguese, English and Arabic speaking zones.

French is the official language of 32 countries. In all French-speaking countries, French coexists with one or several official languages, mother tongues, or national languages. Thus French has the double privilege of being a common language for very different peoples and a means of communication between the other languages and cultures it coexists with.

The IOF's commitment to the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity stems quite naturally from the historical, geographic and cultural realities of its diverse community. In most international organisations, for instance the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, the World Health Organisation, UNESCO, and UNICEF, French is an official and working language. Likewise, the Olympic Charter has designated French as an official language ever since 1896.

French is also a language of instruction in all five continents:

- 90 million people learn French in 170 countries worldwide;
- There are 900,000 French teachers worldwide;
- 80 million students attend French schools.