

Mr. President of the Republic,

Mr. Minister of Sport,

Authorities

Olympic, non-Olympic and Paralympic Champions,

Partners of the Olympic World,

Friends of Sport,

Today I feel privileged because I am here with you all, taking part in a historical event in a suggestive context, and for this reason, I should like to thank you for having accepted the invitation to be here.

This is the first time in the CONI's 103-year history that the President of the Republic has honoured us by visiting our headquarters. Usually – and quite rightly so I should say – it is the CONI, with its Olympic athletes, which goes to the Quirinale - to what we like to call the House of all Italians - first of all loaded with hope and very often, subsequently, loaded with medals.

Today, the President of our country has decided to pay a visit to the House of Sport, to the Coni Building, in the Stadio dei Marmi named after the great Pietro Mennea, in the throbbing heart of the Foro Italico Park, the world's most beautiful, most architectural, most scenic and most iconic sports park, which this evening has smartened up even more for what is a one-of-a-kind and unforgettable event.

On your part, Mr. President, this is a display of great affection and friendship. And we shall be forever grateful to you for it.

But, for us neither has it been easy to straight away identify the place best suited to host this memorable occasion. We have many, all most appealing, but in the end we purposely chose to welcome you here between Palazzo H and the Stadio dei Marmi because this is a symbolic place for many reasons.

It was here, on 25 August 1960 that the 83 nations prepared to parade in the Olympic Games opening ceremony in what, unfortunately, will remain for many years the only Summer Olympics to have been staged in our country.

It was here, just 50 years ago, that a great predecessor of mine, Giulio Onesti, decided to stage what has been one of the most successful Italian sports events ever and one that created so many champions, including future Olympic champions: the Youth Olympic Games.

This inspired idea of Onesti enabled the Italy of sport to cultivate and exalt its youngsters right from their first competitive experiences. Time has changed many things, but nevertheless, albeit in difficult historical context, we have made every effort to re-present determinate physical activity mechanisms through new types of projects which you too, in recent years, have had the chance to publicly acclaim.

Every day, ordinary people can come here to practise sport. The Stadio dei Marmi is a public place, a gym open to everyone, because it gives everyone the same chance to experience sport on a human scale and on a day to day basis.

As I have already said, today I feel privileged because I have been given the chance to present to you our world in its entirety and in all its complexity. Together with the male and female athletes who have made history and made it possible to play our anthem in every corner of our Planet, also here today are those presidents and sports administrators who make our sports movement an exemplary model to be imitated.

The Italy of sport has achieved undisputed prestige on the field; prestige which we firmly defend day after day with our work and our sacrifices, never allowing anyone to tarnish (including by means of short-sighted and unjustified decisions) the respect and consideration we have earned in Italy and worldwide.

We represent a population of nearly twelve million people, made up of both members and sportspersons, over 140 thousand clubs, which recognize and identify with the athletes, the coaches, the administrators and judges, the National Sports Federations, Olympic and non-Olympic and Paralympic, the Associated Sports Disciplines, the Sports Promotion Bodies and the Meritorious Associations. We are one big family, the family of Italian Sport.

A family in which you, Mr. President, have always shown a particular interest and sensitivity, and for this we should like to thank you publicly.

When, later on, you are introduced to our presidents, one by one, you will discover that behind each of them, there is a small army of nearly all volunteers which supports our world with its daily sacrifices and the time it puts at disposal. There are industrialists and office clerks, professional and retired persons, but there are also world and Olympic champions who put their experience at the service of their world and become administrators, thus confirming their leadership skills, not only competitive but also in the managerial field.

In today's world, sport has many functions: it is a school of life, it is teaching, it is culture, it is social integration. Sport is a job opportunity. Thanks to sport, new types of approach to the employment system are taking shape. I am thinking about new professions tied to the figure of the athletes, to the management of facilities, to the organization of events around the country and to Large Events. The sports phenomenon as a whole does not only affect the GDP but can also represent an economic driver for an entire country.

Hence, allow me to express the hope that in coming years Italy will have the strength and the capacity to look at sport as a source of new impetus towards increasingly more ambitious goals. If we are able to work as a team, if Italy is able to work as a team, no objective, not even the most difficult, will be beyond our reach. And our dreams, even the most intrepid, will become reality.

This, Mr. President, is what Italian sport promises to you. To pool our efforts to send our country surging forwards. We dream of a better Italy, a country inspired by our achievements and our team spirit to overcome the challenges of the future.

Thank you for being here with us. Long live Italy! Long live Italian Sport!