Rio 2016 Olympic Torch Relay gets under way as Olympic flame lit in Olympia

IOC President says Games ‘will be a message of hope in troubled times’

The Olympic flame for the Olympic Games Rio 2016 was lit today in Ancient Olympia, Greece, during a ceremony organised by the Hellenic Olympic Committee (HOC).

The lighting marks the symbolic start of the Olympic Torch Relay, which will see the flame travel for six days and 2,235km around Greece before being officially presented to the organisers of the Olympic Games Rio 2016 on 27 April at the Panathenaic Stadium, site of the first modern Olympic Games Athens 1896.

With 106 days to go until the Opening Ceremony of the Games, International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach took the opportunity to deliver a message of solidarity with the people of Brazil, which is currently experiencing political and economic difficulties. The IOC President also spoke of the power of the Olympic flame in promoting peace and spreading the Olympic values.

“These Olympic Games will be a message of hope in troubled times – and the flame will carry this message into all corners of Brazil and, indeed, all the world,” said President Bach. “In these difficult days that Brazil is facing, the flame is a timeless reminder that we are all part of the same humanity. The flame is an ancient symbol of peace and harmony, a symbol of the power of humanity to come together despite our differences. This will be the greatest legacy of the Olympic Games for Brazil and for the world.

He continued: “The torch relay will spread the message of our shared humanity to all people of the beautiful country of Brazil, a nation that is built on the idea that its strength comes from uniting all of its cultural richness. Brazil is unique in its diversity. Let the celebration of the XXXI Olympiad give reason to all the people of this vast and wonderful country to show the world the true meaning of unity in diversity.”

One of the 450 people to carry the torch in Greece will be a Syrian refugee who has claimed asylum in the country. The as yet unnamed refugee will run through the Open Reception Centre for refugees in Athens, the same refugee centre President Bach visited in January.
Before departing for Brazil, the torch will visit Geneva and Lausanne, home of the IOC. The Brazilian leg of the Olympic Torch Relay will begin on 3 May in Brasilia. [Click here for full details of the Olympic Torch Relay in Brazil.]

Attending the lighting ceremony were President of the Hellenic Republic Prokopis Pavlopoulos; Brazilian Minister of Sport Ricardo Leyser; President of the Organising Committee for the Rio 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games Carlos Nuzman, President of the HOC Spyros Capralos; IOC Vice-President and Chair of the IOC Coordination Commission for the Olympic Games Rio 2016 Nawal El Moutawakel; and IOC Vice-President Zaiqing Yu.

About the Olympic Games Rio 2016
The Games of the XXXI Olympiad will be held from 5 to 21 August 2016. Approximately 10,500 athletes from more than 200 countries will compete in 28 sports, comprising 98 medal events. For further information, [please visit the Rio 2016 website.]

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The International Olympic Committee is a not-for-profit independent international organisation made up of volunteers, which is committed to building a better world through sport. It redistributes more than 90 per cent of its income to the wider sporting movement, which means that every day the equivalent of USD 3.25 million goes to help athletes and sports organisations at all levels around the world.

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