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Story Headline: As world awaits Singapore summit, ‘door is open’ to Korean unity says IOC President

Location: PyeongChang, Republic of Korea. Lausanne, Switzerland. Pyongyang, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

Date: 11th June 2018

STORY SCRIPT

As the world awaits a historic meeting between US President Donald Trump and North Korea’s Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un, the International Olympic Committee can take some credit for the thaw in Korean relations.

For it was at the recent Pyeongchang 2018 Olympic Winter Games, after years of painstaking political groundwork, that the two Koreas successfully came together under the Olympic flag.

IOC President Thomas Bach said: “During all this time we kept the door open for the South and for the North so that after the tensions were thawing and the truce resolution was adopted, we could concentrate again on the participation and there both North Korea and South Korea always knew that we were ready to make exceptional decisions”.

In 2014, the IOC began outreach to government officials in both Koreas in anticipation of PyeongChang 2018 and initiated a programme to support
athletes from the DPRK in the qualification process for the 2018 Olympic Winter Games. That conversation continued and evolved through geopolitical ups and downs.

Said Bach: “After the new year’s address of the leader of DPRK, where he committed to the participation of North Korea, we could call then the meeting with the governments of both Koreas: with the NOCs of both Koreas, here in Lausanne to agree on the joint declaration, which the IOC initiated and where the IOC then finally established the joint march and the joint women’s ice hockey team”.

Following high-level talks between senior officials from South and North Korea in early January 2018, Kim Jong-un announced North Korea’s participation in the Olympic Winter Games PyeongChang 2018 by sending a delegation of athletes, officials and a group of cheerleaders.

Shortly after this announcement, the IOC called for a meeting in Lausanne between the IOC, the two NOCs, the two governments and the PyeongChang 2018 Organising Committee, which resulted in all parties signing the ‘Olympic Korean Peninsula Declaration’.

This declaration contained decisions by the IOC to make the participation and joint activities of the two teams possible and culminated in the image of the two
teams marching into the Opening Ceremony under the Korean Unification Flag. The joint Korean women’s hockey team also came together to compete as one.

Added Thomas Bach: “This participation of the athletes from the NOC of DPRK and then the joint march, and then also the joint women’s ice hockey team, was the result of a long time effort by the IOC. In fact we started in 2014 by providing special programmes for the athletes from North Korea to prepare, to hopefully qualify and then to participate and there contacts were going on all the time”.

During a recent visit to North Korea by the IOC President, Kim Jong-un fully committed to the participation of athletes from his country in the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022 and the next editions of the Youth Olympic Games, in Buenos Aires this year and Lausanne in 2020. The IOC is already working on a special programme to allow North Korean athletes to prepare and qualify for the upcoming Olympic Games.

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