

## THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO CONGRESS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

I have been fortunate enough to take to the podium before you on many occasions in my role as FIFA President.

But each time I stand ready to give the President's Address, I am always humbled by what I see - the great diversity and vibrancy of our footballing community. A truly global movement.

Through football we are changing lives, bringing joy to millions with our inspiring tournaments and working hard to protect the game we all love.

We are 209 nations. But in truth we are just one.

One people brought together on the level playing field of football.

One global movement united by the same goal - to touch the world through football, to develop the game and to use its power and popularity to build a better future for those less fortunate than ourselves.

One community, one nation!

There are few sports with football's global reach and influence, from the very top to the very bottom of society.

Few sports that mean so much, to so many.

A sport that breaks down barriers.

Let us never forget that as we move forward.

We are stronger when we act together.

## **2. FIFA'S REFORMS**

Here in the beautiful island nation of Mauritius, we are joined together to decide the future of our game.

This Congress ranks among the most important for the football community as we complete our reform process, improving the way we work and setting the highest standards in good governance in sport.

We have been through a difficult time. It has been a test for the world of football and for those who lead it.

As your captain, I am happy to say that FIFA has weathered the storm. We have emerged from troubled waters stronger and now we can look towards a bright and productive future – hopefully as beautiful, calm and transparent as the sea around us in Mauritius,

You, as FIFA's Member Associations, will help us put the finishing touches to what has been a long, but ultimately rewarding, journey.

There are those who have openly criticised what we are doing. As if it would be better to do nothing, to leave things as they were.

And there are those who say we have not gone far enough, that we have evaded the difficult decisions and buried our heads in the sand.

There are a few, finally, who always will criticise no matter what we are doing.

To those who fear to change I say: We needed to reinforce our defences to protect the future of the game. FIFA and football play too significant a role in the world today for us not to improve our accountability and to demand more of our decision makers.

Football may be very much the same game as it was a hundred years ago, but the world of football is now a huge economic, social and political force with the power to influence lives.

And to those who say we have not gone far enough, I would say this:

FIFA is an organisation based on solidarity and democracy. Here at Congress it is one nation, one vote. As it should be.

But reforming this great organisation is not about one person or one interest group dictating to everyone else. It is about 209 nations and 209 voices moving forward as one, in harmony.

We have more than met that challenge by working arm in arm in solidarity for the improvement of the game.

It would be a lie to say it has been easy. It has not.

Yes, we needed to change.

Yes, we had to ask ourselves some tough questions.

And yes, we had to fight resistance within our own community for the better of the game. It did hurt.

But as any good football team, we persevered and it has paid dividends.

These are sweeping and hard-hitting reforms that will change our organisation for the better and place FIFA at the forefront of governance standards in the world of sport.

We are now well equipped for the next, challenging era of football:

- integrity checks for decision makers
- punishment for those that let us and football down
- greater powers for Congress in choosing World Cup bids
- female representation on the Executive Committee
- and improved transparency

Soon, we will ask you to decide on the final package of reforms, including a question on age limits and terms of office for key positions.

For me, if we are to introduce such limits they will need to be brought in across the board, reflected throughout the football community.

We cannot have one rule for one and another for everyone else – that is the wrong message to send to the world.

With this final batch of reforms, this year's Congress will mark the pinnacle of 15 years of evolution.

It has been my goal and my duty to improve what FIFA does and how we do it - making FIFA more transparent, more stable and more accountable.

It is a duty I take extremely seriously and one I have never flinched from, even in the most testing of times.

Since 1998, just look at some of the things we have achieved:

- FIFA World Cup rotation
- Annual financial auditing for FIFA and our member associations
- Strict budgeting and payment control
- An Ethics Committee, a Code of Ethics, robust Statutes

- Development plans for all our members with heavy and sustained investment from FIFA
- And we have turned around our finances to stand in extremely good financial health, as we will hear at this Congress

I think we can all agree we have come a long way since 1998.

I urge you now to make your own mark on history by passing our final reforms.

This has always been about doing what we know is right, doing everything we can to safeguard the future of the game we all love.

We needed to give football a solid foundation, the platform it needs to flourish in.

We are doing just that - right here, right now.

Through these reforms, we will emerge stronger than ever, ready to take football to all corners of the globe, to stage the greatest tournaments and to use the power, financial potential and popularity of this wonderful sport to build a better future for those who need our help.

### **3. PROTECTING THE GAME – RACISM**

Our work must not stop there, crucial though reform is to safeguarding our future and rebuilding trust.

FIFA's mission is full of big responsibilities – none bigger than protecting the integrity of the game and the rights of all those involved in it.

There have been despicable events this year that have cast a long shadow over football and the rest of society.

I am speaking of the politics of hate – racism, ignorance, discrimination, intolerance, small-minded prejudice. That uncivilised, immoral and self-destructive force that we all detest.

It certainly has no place in football. Football is a sport that brings people together as one, from street corner to stadium. The very essence of the sport is one of unity and equality.

The ball does not discriminate and neither should we.

We must join together as one to drive prejudice from our door, to show the rest of the world how we should behave towards each other – with respect and compassion.

While we, in this hall, can all agree that racism must be stopped, more must be done outside, back in our respective home nations.

We need zero tolerance and strict punishments everywhere.

We must lead. We must set a tough, uncompromising example.

Football can show the way. We can make a difference.

With our newly formed Task Force, led by Jeffrey Webb, and the tough resolution before you this week, we can send a strong signal to the racists that their time is up.

But we need the help of all. We cannot win this battle alone!

#### **4. PROTECTING THE GAME – MATCH MANIPULATION**

FIFA, as the guardian of international football, is doing more than ever before to protect the integrity of the game.

And there is no greater threat to the future of football than match manipulation – deliberately fixing the result of a game for financial gain.

In response, FIFA has created a specialised Security unit to work alongside international and national crime fighters.

We have also set up a whistleblower hotline to encourage players and officials to come forward in confidence.

Rest assured, we will never give up the fight.

But we need to do this together:

- to educate our players on the risks involved and what to do if they are approached by match fixers
- to co-operate with investigators at all levels
- and to reassure fans that football's integrity is rock solid

## **5. CONCLUSION**

FIFA is never standing still.

We are always looking at how to improve, how to make good our mission and how to bring our values to life - to use football's unique position as a truly global sport to make a difference.

As your President, I am determined to build on this proud legacy.

We have come a long way, but we must never rest.

There is always work to be done.

Through uncompromising reforms, we are laying strong foundations for the future.

Through innovation and tough action, we are safeguarding the rights of our players and protecting the game we all love.

Through consistent and dedicated investment, we are developing the game and improving standards everywhere.

Through working together, we are making a difference and changing lives for the better.

And here in Mauritius, we are all helping to write the next chapter in a truly inspiring story.

The inspiring story of football, the beautiful game.

Nations coming together to move forward as one.

We have weathered the storm. Let us now take football to the next level.

For the Game. For the World.