

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

It is an honor to address you today in the welcoming and Olympic spirit-filled town of Lake Placid, a place where we have experienced many memorable sporting events.

Last year was no exception; our season began right here and continued across three continents. Throughout the year, sports organizations worldwide strived to connect people, countries, and continents through sport. Unfortunately, despite these efforts, the geopolitical climate remains very tense. We see violence and aggression, along with their negative impacts on people and economic processes, which unfortunately also hinder the development of sports.

I am pleased that the unity and energy of our Federation have been powerful driving forces enabling us to achieve our goals and enjoy a very successful season. With the "SLIDE 2026" strategy, the future of our sport is clearly defined. We are making the sport more accessible, bringing it closer to the people. This season has seen excellent competition on both natural and artificial tracks, attracting a growing audience in person, online, and through media coverage. Our sophisticated mix of TV broadcasts and FIL live streaming offers the best way to experience sledding activities worldwide.

The Youth Olympic Games 2024 were exceptional from the FIL perspective, organized to the highest standards and building on Korea's rich Olympic heritage and organizational excellence. I extend my gratitude to everyone involved in this endeavor, including Olympic Solidarity, which provided two years of preparatory support to the young athletes. This support has broadened our capacity to collaborate with National Federations and has underscored the extensive efforts of the FIL team, coaches, the Organizing Committee in Korea, and our colleagues at the IOC. Indeed, the overall performance and the quality of the sporting results are crucial, aiding both us and the IOC in confidently shaping the foundational criteria for the development of the Youth Olympic Games.

The results achieved provide a solid foundation for athletes as they advance within the Olympic Movement in the future.

Our strategy closely aligns with the IOC's strategic document, AGENDA 2020+5, which emphasizes the importance of attracting a young audience. This is particularly vital in our Federation and our sport, known for being one of the most extreme, fastest, and most appealing. Today, our task is to demonstrate that we are a key player in the overall Olympic process.

The Olympic Games and the World Championships are undoubtedly the most prestigious platforms for Luge today, showcasing athletes from all continents and nations. Our goal is to ensure these stages are accessible to our members by meeting the established criteria.

We must consider factors such as climate change and its impact on winter sports, particularly in relation to the competition calendar, including the Winter Olympics. Additionally, we need to

account for the integration of new technologies in daily life, their contribution to work efficiency, and the optimal utilization of existing sports facilities. This is crucial when assessing event costs and the economic effectiveness relative to our objectives.

These and other relevant issues are continuously addressed in the daily operations of the FIL.

For a long time, our Commissions and Working Groups have been dedicated to developing innovative products and guidelines. I am pleased to report that these have been provided to our partners as valuable tools for future planning. Examples include the FIL sustainability program, which promotes environmentally friendly activities, and the Playbook we have developed, both of which significantly enhance our strategic vision and the planning of future initiatives.

Considering that the Olympics and sports are grounded in a long-term development strategy, all the points I've discussed above are crucial for securing a sustainable future.

Today, the most pressing issue we face concerns the venue for the Olympic Winter Games Milano-Cortina 2026, which will serve as a hub for sliding sports. The timeline for constructing the facility in Cortina has been exceedingly tight. This period encompasses both the official announcements made at last year's IOC session in Mumbai, which detailed the search for a sports facility outside Italy and the development of Plan B, and the recent announcements about the commencement of construction on their own track earlier this year. Of course, life has taught us that sometimes the seemingly impossible can indeed become reality.

I am deeply grateful to our partners in other Winter Sports Federations, the IOC, the Milano-Cortina Organizing Committee, and the FIL Expert Group for their cooperation and proactive efforts in advancing this process constructively.

In accordance with the FIL Executive Board's decision, our top priority is the Cortina track and the Olympic competitions hosted there. Achieving this goal is crucial for the future endeavors of the FIL and will significantly influence the development of luge, particularly in Italy. However, regardless of the circumstances, we are bound by a firm deadline for the track's pre-homologation—March 25, 2025. This deadline is directly tied to our utmost priority: athlete safety.

In collaboration with the IOC and MiCo, we have clearly identified the need for a Plan B, which is being developed alongside the ongoing processes in Cortina and will be activated if the construction schedule is not met. This contingency plan is also being refined by MiCo through negotiations with three potential Olympic organizers. On the FIL side, we have completed all risk assessments for Plan B to minimize potential costs. These documents have been submitted to our partners at MiCo and the IOC, from whom we expect decisions that will ensure the safe participation of our athletes in the 2026 Winter Olympics, with athlete safety and the secure conduct of the events as our top priorities.

Over the past year, we have addressed these and other issues through direct discussions with IOC leadership. This included a comprehensive presentation on the current status of athlete quotas, their impact on the development of the sport, and the collaborative efforts required to achieve the objectives outlined in AGENDA 2020+5.

We are not alone in this endeavor. The Association of Winter Sports Federations, now known as the Winter Olympic Federations (WOF), provides a shared platform that enables us to benefit from collective support and a jointly developed strategic plan, crafted under the guidance of FIL Secretary General Dwight Bell.

The current focus areas of WOF's activities align closely with broader trends:

1. Games Optimization
2. Updates on the Olympic Winter Games 2030 and 2034
3. The Future of the Youth Olympic Games
4. OQS (Olympic Qualification System) Update
5. Digital Engagement and Promotion for MiCo 2026

I addressed some of these issues at last year's Congress and, as evidenced by the above, we have developed concrete results and proposals for future development.

On the second point, IOC President Thomas Bach has appointed me as the WOF representative on the Future Host Commission, which is charged with facilitating a targeted dialogue for the Olympic Winter Games 2030 in the French Alps and the 2034 Games in Salt Lake City, Utah. The commission's report to the IOC Executive Board is the culmination of extensive hard work, and I am hopeful that the IOC Session in Paris on July 24 will make a historic decision securing a clear future not only for our sport but for the entire Olympic Winter Games.

Decisions on athlete quotas and the program are made approximately 3.5 years before each Games. As mentioned, we are prepared and ready for the upcoming round of negotiations. The most important aspect of ensuring the success of all these processes is our focus on athletes, their rights, and the FIL's involvement in day-to-day operations.

I extend my thanks to the Athletes' Commission for their efforts thus far, particularly last season, in actively engaging and crafting proposals for competitions under challenging weather conditions. This collaboration with the FIL Sport and Technical Directors has opened new avenues for competition planning, particularly in the latter part of the season. Regarding safe sport and athletes' mental health, these are driven by the FIL Integrity Unit, led by Steve Harris. We will delve into this topic more extensively during the Congress.

Teamwork, mutual support, and coordinated planning in athlete preparation are crucial in the FIL's operations, as is the efficient use of funding, particularly in collaboration with National Federations. Special thanks go to Fred Zimny and the FIL coaches, and to those Federations who have embraced our Partner Program by hosting international athletes for extended periods.

This sentiment was beautifully expressed by our ISU colleague, Fredi Schmid, who, during his first visit to the luge competitions in Altenberg at the World Championships, remarked, "You are not just sport, you are family."

This is the highest praise I have recently heard about the FIL.

Respect for family values and mutual solidarity is key to achieving our goals, bringing sport closer to people and people closer to sport.

In this regard, the accessibility of luge is crucial. I extend my gratitude to my colleagues on the Artificial Track Commissions for their work in developing new concepts and testing new equipment and competition formats for the upcoming season. I am confident that these initiatives will attract more athletes and new member countries, further opening opportunities for our Federation in the Olympic circuit.

Thank you to our colleagues on the Natural Track Commission for making decisive preparations for this Congress, aligning perfectly with our development strategy to make luge as accessible as possible worldwide.

Thank you to our sponsors and supporters, without whom our progress would be impossible.

I also appreciate the efforts of my colleagues on the FIL Executive Board and in the FIL Office. Through our united and focused efforts, we continue to modernize and streamline our processes.

Thanks to the coordinated efforts of FIL Executive Director Christoph Schweiger and FIL VP of Finance Geoff Balme, we are proud to present the budget for 2024/25 and a comprehensive report on our recent activities.

Finally, thanks to the athletes and your initiative, we enjoyed a fantastic season's closing evening in a vibrant new format. Keep going!

Together, we can achieve great things!

Yours,  
Einars Fogelis