

## **Address of CHOD at the International Symposium of CISM**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome the Symposium of the International Military Sports Council hosted this year here in Ancient Olympia, the cradle of the immortal Olympic Spirit.

I am also extremely happy as the Symposium takes place in Greece in a very special year for us Greeks, as we celebrate the glorious Bicentennial of the Greek Revolution which led to our Independence and the foundation of the modern Greek State.

First of all, and on the occasion of the presence of so many distinguished guests at the premises of the International Olympic Academy, I would like to remind you that in ancient times, and I am talking about the 5th century BC era, politicians, philosophers and intellectuals used to gather here in Ancient Olympia from all over Greece in order to present their ideas and to exchange views with each other on important issues. And this was taking place each and every year!

It is this legacy along with your presence here which will give you the unique opportunity to consider the value of military sports and their timeless inherent connection with military life, as history demonstrates so accurately.

Undoubtedly, sports are a crucial factor in shaping the warrior of all times and places. War has always demanded and continues to this day to demand soldiers with physical strength and endurance, capable of confronting any opponent and bringing victory to their Homeland, and this is why the Armed Forces of all countries worldwide seek to have in their ranks personnel in excellent physical condition.

Exercise is the foundation of military training, which is why it is part of every military program in the world. Let us not forget, after all, that one of the main reasons for the revival of the Olympic Games by Baron Pierre de Coubertin was the improvement of the physical condition of French soldiers.

It is true also that the warrior and the athlete have a lot in common. Both prepare intensively and with utmost discipline their mind and body in view of the hard fight they will eventually give. Both are inspired by virtues such as courage, endurance and constant effort, and they both seek victory; the athlete on the track, the fighter on the battlefield; a victory which will give glory and honor both to themselves and to their homeland, making them also immortal!

Indicative of the connection between sports and war is also the fact that in the language of sports we often hear terms borrowed from military terminology, such as "full-frontal attack", "good defense" or "tactical move". And indeed, in the minds of the ancient Greeks the connection between war and sports was much, much deeper. And this is proven by historical data, as the games of the ancient Olympics were basically inspired by the way war was conducted. For example the speed race between the hoplites were conducted by carrying a full load of battle, the chariot races were cruel and violent, the discus throw represented the throwing of a stone in battle, the javelin competition simulated spear throwing, and the melee battle was incorporated in Pankration. The vast majority of athletes who participated in the ancient Olympic Games were also hoplites, and the symbolic tearing down part of the city walls in honor of the Olympians, wanted to show that ancient Greeks felt safe from external dangers, and that if the city had such a high level of athletes-warriors, it would not need walls to defend itself.

Furthermore and on the occasion of the Bicentennial of the proclamation of the Greek Revolution of 1821, I would like to remind you of the dominant position that physical exercise held in the lives of the Greek fighters of that time. I am referring to the Klephts and Armatoles who lived in the freedom of the mountains, training themselves very hard for maximum physical strength, superhuman endurance and great speed, in order to win the difficult battles they fought against large numbers of opponents. This is why they competed with each other in running on the mountain slopes, marksmanship, in throwing the stone, in jumping, in riding and in wrestling.

With these thoughts in mind, I welcome the Symposium of the International Military Sports Council and declare the start of its works,

expressing the certainty that it will be a first-class opportunity to highlight to the fullest extent the value of military sports and the deep link between them and the Armed Forces.

Thank you.