

The President**Marco Sclaris' speech****World Climbing General Assembly 2026**

Torino, 23 April 2026

OPENING

Dear Presidents of the Federations, dear Secretaries General, dear Delegates, dear Mrs. Berhane, IOC member and chair of World Climbing Ethics Commission

I hope you are all well, and I would like to welcome you to the 23rd World Climbing General Assembly.

The initial premises were very different: thanks to the cooperation and enthusiasm of the Saudi federation, we had organised a meeting rich in important topics and, above all, with ample space for discussion on the major challenges that our sport—like all sports today—has to face.

Unfortunately, on 28 February of this year, in the interval between the Milano Cortina Olympic Games and the Milano Cortina 2026 Paralympic Games, the Olympic Truce was once again broken, and the outbreak of war in the Middle East forced us to cancel our General Assembly scheduled to take place in Riyadh.

However, in order to comply with the institutional obligations imposed on us by Swiss law the General Assembly must take place, so we converted it into a virtual assembly.

In this dramatic context, following consultation with our Swiss legal counsel, Kellerhals-Carrard, the Executive Board decided to approve a streamlined agenda suitable for a virtual General Assembly, taking into account the limitations inherent in this type of meeting.

I believe you are all aware of this and have read the relevant documents that were made available: we received several motions from some of our member federations.

Without going into the substance of the legal aspects related to the content of these motions, I would like to reiterate that—once again, beyond their legal aspects—it was never the intention of the Executive Board to avoid debate within the proposed timelines, nor to sidestep a possible vote, always in accordance with the Statutes. If this was the impression given, we apologise for it.

You must recognise the opposite: it was precisely in the spirit of inclusion, openness and transparency that we had planned a wide-ranging and inclusive discussion in Riyadh, addressing issues that deeply unsettle our societies.

It was intended to be an exceptional assembly, with broad participation and substantive debate, at a pivotal moment for the development of our sport.

We understand that for some federations certain issues are fundamental—and it was precisely for this reason that we had originally designed the General Assembly in the way it was initially planned.

Things did not unfold as we had hoped. The winds of war and other dramatic circumstances prevented our General Assembly from taking place as originally planned.

Given that conditions have changed dramatically and drastically, the Board nonetheless believes that discussion, and a possible vote on certain matters, remains necessary, within timelines that the federations may decide later during this meeting, under item 4.2 of the agenda.

This framework was already circulated in yesterday's April 22 Executive Board Decisions Summary, and which you have all received.

The President

With this proposal, we clarify that discussion and any possible vote on the motions were suspended at this meeting today, for organisational and practical reasons and postponed to a time to be determined later during the course of this meeting by the federations.

We hope that this can meet your expectations.

On the technical and legal aspects, as well as on the attribution of powers inside World Climbing to the various World Climbing bodies—particularly regarding the management of the General Assembly agenda—which have raised some questions, I now give the floor to Dr. Bernhard Berger, who has been assisting us for many years and guiding us through the sometimes complex framework of Swiss law, to which we are subject.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Olympic Games Milano–Cortina 2026

I have had the privilege of attending two editions of the Winter Olympic Games in my own country, one of them in my own city and in the mountains that surround it, where I truly feel at home: Torino, in 2006.

Twenty years later, it was the turn of Milano–Cortina.

This edition was spread across the Alps and inevitably required making choices about where to stay and which sport to watch.

So, after one week in Milano for the IOC Session and the Opening Ceremony, I spent several days in Cortina d'Ampezzo, where, during the competitions and in the evenings, I had the opportunity to meet repeatedly with IOC members and executives, with President Coventry, former President Bach, as well as representatives of Brisbane 2032, who were visiting at the time.

In a world marked by geopolitical tensions and violent conflict, Milano Cortina 2026 offered something hopeful – proof that even in unsettled times, the Winter Games, the Olympic Games and sport can still adapt, endure and inspire.

Milano Cortina's legacy was showing why the world needs an event like the Olympics, while the world needs sport in turbulent times.

LA 28

We are entering the final phase of preparations for Los Angeles 2028, where we are expected to take part in both the Olympic and, for the first time, the Paralympic Games. With just over two years to go...

Beyond LA 28: an open Games

As for Brisbane 2032, you all know very well that the Games remain open. As recently as September last year, there was still complete uncertainty surrounding the sports programme—and, as far as we were concerned, our own possible status.

I am aware that, despite my repeated warnings over the months, many of you were convinced that, after being included in three editions of the Olympic Games, and with our confirmation as a core sport at Los Angeles 2028, our presence in Brisbane and beyond would be automatic.

I had already explained several times the so-called “sliding doors” system applied to the Olympic programme—a system that, in theory, guarantees no sport permanent inclusion. And the context did not help: Brisbane signed a contract to host 28 sports, whereas Los Angeles will host 31.

The President

At that point, we met with the IOC President and made a very clear case: the programme must finally be defined according to fair, objective, and transparent criteria.

For our sport, my position was straightforward. If, in a hypothetical ranking at Paris, climbing were to place 29th, then it would be logical for us to remain an additional sport (and then lose the Paralympics). But if it performed better, then there would be no reason not to be included in the Brisbane programme.

We were not the only ones to speak and put forward these arguments,, and finally our voices were heard.

A few days later, the IOC launched the “Fit for the Future” process, replacing the long-standing Olympic Agenda reform framework introduced under former President Thomas Bach.

Fit for the Future is the new IOC working structure and this new framework is built around four Working Groups.

First, the Youth Olympic Games Working Group, whose mandate is to assess the future relevance and format of the YOG

Second, the Olympic Programme Working Group, which is the most strategically important for International Federations. Its task is to review the composition and size of the Olympic programme, balancing tradition and universality with youth appeal and innovation. The group is also developing transparent processes for adding or removing sports and disciplines, while exploring potential cross-overs between Summer and Winter sports, the timing of the Games, and better alignment with the global sports calendar. The objective is clear: to keep the programme relevant without uncontrolled expansion.

Third, the Protection of the Female Category Working Group, whose mandate was to develop frameworks to safeguard the female category in sport, in close cooperation with international federations and independent experts.

The primary outcome of this Working Group was the adoption by the IOC Executive Board, in March 2026, of a new IOC Policy on the Protection of the Female Category in Olympic Sport, applicable from the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games onwards and not retroactive.

At the heart of this policy lies a clear principle: eligibility for the female category at IOC events is based on biological sex.

For all sports on the Olympic programme, participation in the female category is therefore restricted to biological females, with the stated objective of safeguarding fairness, safety, and the integrity of women’s sport, based on scientific evidence.

Finally, fourth, the Commercial Partnerships and Marketing Working Group, tasked with reviewing the IOC’s commercial and marketing model, assessing existing partnerships, sponsorship structures, and digital engagement platforms, while identifying new revenue opportunities and enhanced use of Olympic Broadcast Services and Olympic Channel Services—always in line with Olympic values.

What are the strategic implications for International Federations?

For IFs, and certainly for ours, the work of the Olympic Programme Working Group has the most direct and material impact.

We can clearly expect a higher bar for Olympic inclusion and retention, with stricter and more transparent criteria relating to athlete numbers, gender balance, universality, global reach, youth appeal, and innovation. This inevitably increases pressure on smaller federations and on sports with more limited global participation.

At the same time, we are moving toward a more dynamic programme model, with mechanisms that may allow easier addition and removal of sports or disciplines, and even rotation or conditional inclusion. Olympic value will have to be demonstrated continuously, not secured once and for all.

The President

Finally, a review of the global sports calendar may lead to requests to adjust the timing of World Championships and to greater coordination between IF calendars and Olympic cycles—particularly for sports with already congested schedules.

Our engagement with Brisbane 2032

It is in this context that we travelled to Brisbane in October and began an intense, friendly, and productive collaboration.

Many meetings followed, and more recently our Sport Team—under the coordination of Vice President Cleary—was in Australia to move further ahead with preparations for what we all hope will be our participation.

We now await the proposals of the Working Group and their presentation to the IOC Session at the end of June in Lausanne.

Once the criteria are approved, the IOC Programme Commission will assess all sports and is expected, by the end of 2026, to formulate the proposal for the Brisbane programme. Final approval would then come from the Session in the spring of 2027.

Some in Lausanne suggest an earlier decision may be possible—but, at this stage, that does not appear truly realistic.

This is the overall framework within which we are operating today, and within which we will continue to operate in the coming months.

There remains one other important question that still requires an answer: the distribution of revenues after Los Angeles 2028—or, put bluntly, how much money will reach us in December 2028 from broadcasting rights.

We will not know this before next year, when ASOIF concludes its negotiations with the IOC, negotiations that will also be based on the criteria defined by the Working Group we have just discussed.

I am optimistic, but we should always remember that at Los Angeles there will be 31 sports, three more than the 28 as in Paris.

In the meantime, we have reached an agreement with the IOC to take part in the Olympic Qualifying Series, as was already the case on the road to 2028. This will ensure that many of our athletes have the opportunity to participate in an Olympic event, given that the quota places for Los Angeles remain extremely limited.

At the same time, this participation will also allow us to rely on additional resources, which will support a solid level of operational capacity right through to the Olympic Games in 2028.

Succession in transition

As you know, World Climbing will have a new President in 2029, and some Board members will step down due to term limits. But beyond the question of leadership, this is really about a broader transition — a shift from a pioneering phase to a phase of consolidation and solid growth.

We are experiencing a very important moment in the history of our federation.

Over the past months, a great amount of work has been done — and continues — to define the guiding documents that will shape the activities of all World Climbing components and how they interact. We have just completed the first phase: the Executive Board has approved the Terms of Reference and a series of Policies which act as the implementing decrees of the World Climbing Statutes. These will help us ensure the harmonious and transparent functioning of our federation.

Looking ahead to future leadership, the Executive Board decided to mandate the Governance Commission to develop several proposals. The Ethics Commission will be involved as well.

The President

Let me highlight that the Chair of the Ethics Commission, Dagmawit Berhane, has been an IOC Member since 2013 and is a prominent figure in the Olympic Movement, with strong experience in integrity, compliance, and ethical governance.

There are several areas in which we can work to create the best possible conditions for the next elections. Time is on our side: the sooner we reach conclusions, the more credible the process will be, and the more protected it will remain from undue influence.

When it comes to the Presidency in particular, I would like to involve you National Federations, as much as possible. Following what some other international federations have done, for example I would like to ask you what kind of President you envision for the future.

Once we collect this input, we could develop non-binding guidelines — criteria — to present to the General Assembly.

This process could take place during the Climbing Summit in December, followed by a vote at the 2027 General Assembly.

And the same process could also be extended to the other Board positions.

In this perspective, I would also like to mention another project — one that looks further ahead into the future — based on suggestions coming from different stakeholders, and from inside the Executive Board.

I'm referring to the World Climbing 2040 Vision. Again, I see the Climbing Summit as the ideal setting to gather input on how we imagine our federation over the next 15 years.

Let's not forget that next year, in 2027, we'll celebrate the 20th anniversary of the foundation of our International Federation: a perfect moment, after the first twenty years, to climb into the future.

CONCLUSIONS

As always, at the conclusion of our Assembly, I would like to thank the people who made it possible for this Assembly to take place despite all the difficulties.

These are the very same people who, every single day, with enormous passion and the highest level of professionalism, ensure that our sport continues to grow and develop within an objectively difficult and complex environment.

Under the leadership of our Secretary General, Piero – a friend – the Federation has evolved from being a group of friends into an organisation of the highest level. My sincere thanks also go to the entire Dream Team, to the Department Directors, Francesca, Silvia, Erica, Fabrizio, Vincent, as well as to Abel, Alessandro, Hazel, Irem, Laura, Marco, Richard, Samuel.

Every day, after my usual thirty-five-FORTY-minute walk from home to the office, it is always a great pleasure to be welcomed by your smiles and your warmth.

And of course, a special thank you to all my friends and colleagues on the Board. In these challenging times, when even the future of sport is at risk, I can assure you that their competence, preparation, attention to detail, and love for climbing have made a real difference on many occasions. We have a Board made up of exceptional individuals, starting with the Vice Presidents: Naomi, Anne-Worley, Pierre, and Kobinata-san. The Continental Members: Burgi, Guowei, Chris, René, and Stephan. And finally, our two Athlete Representatives, Kyra and Campbell, who bring fresh energy to the Board and are able to translate their passion and commitment from the field of play and the training gyms into our discussions around the table.

Thank you all, from the bottom of my heart!

Before we conclude, I'd like to share a few final reflections.



**WORLD
CLIMBING**

The President

If sport becomes primarily a terrain for confrontation—aligned successively against one country, then another, or against categories of states or systems—then we must reflect carefully on the direction we are taking.

Is this the role of sport? Is this what sport is meant to represent?

If sport is increasingly instrumentalised for purposes that lie outside its core mission, we risk weakening the very ideals on which the Olympic movement is founded: universality, neutrality, and peaceful coexistence.

Perhaps our greatest challenge is precisely this: to preserve, even in times of global tension, spaces where dialogue remains possible, where respect prevails, and where competition does not become a continuation of conflict by other means.

Returning to the essence of our sport—to climbing itself—may remind us of what unites us, rather than what divides us.

Let us not fall into the deadly trap of a culture of suspicion.

Climbing is built on trust; climbing is a model of trust.

If one of you comes to me and tells me they have climbed an 8a onsight, I don't start wondering what might be behind it, how they really climbed it... I believe them, and I congratulate them.

Let us protect climbing and preserve its values.

All the best

Marco Maria Sclaris