As Chairperson of the IOC, I would like to update you on the status of the forthcoming 53rd session of the IOC Executive Council scheduled at UNESCO from 30 June to 3rd July 2020, as outlined in the invitation Circular Letter 2797 dated 16 March. In the light of the continuous spread of Covid-19 and the containment measures in place in many countries, the IOC Officers, together with the Executive Secretary and senior staff, held a meeting by video conferencing on Wednesday April 1st. Upon extensive consultations, we all concluded that the current conditions worldwide would not allow for the presence of national delegations in Paris end of June.

Under the provisions of the IOC Rules of Procedure (RoP) and in consultation with the UNESCO Legal Advisor, we considered a number of options. Many international meetings of a less formal nature than the Executive Council of IOC are now held in virtual space. However, convening of a session of the Executive Council by virtual means is not explicitly foreseen in the IOC RoP. As such, any alternative (virtual) proceedings would not only require the suspension of a number of rules through a decision adopted by the majority of all the Member States of the Commission (RoP 56), but will, in our opinion, negatively impact the quality of the debate and not allow for a truly collegial and inclusive decision-making.

In the light of the above, there is a consensus amongst the Officers to seek your agreement as Members States of the Executive Council to postpone the 53rd session to a date yet to be determined, likely in 2021. As a reminder, RoP 19.2 states that ‘the Executive Council shall hold two
ordinary sessions during the interval between ordinary Assembly sessions at times and places to be determined by the Council'. This means that IOC will need to hold two sessions of Executive Council before the IOC Assembly-31.

If the Executive Council Member States could agree to postponing the 53rd Session of the Executive Council, the items included in its provisional agenda would be dealt with by one of the three following means, namely:

(i) consultation by correspondence for the adoption of the Implementation Plan for the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development prior to its submission to the UN General Assembly, in the spirit of RoP 23;


(iii) continuing the work on an interim approach for all other issues on the agenda, in close communication with Member States and consulting on major steps as may be necessary.

The documentation under preparation for the EC-53 session will be finalized and made available on the session webpage as initially foreseen. Based on the Action Paper for the session, as initially intended, the Secretariat will develop a Roadmap document of work for all agenda items, as indicated above.

Under these exceptional circumstances, which impact our lives, safety, capacities and the development of our activities, communication with and between Member States is crucial, as well as it is essential that the Secretariat continue to receive guidance by Member States. A series of online information sessions (webinars) on key programmatic matters will be organized, and we invite all of you to enhance communication with the Officers of the Commission and directly with the Secretariat on any item of concern.

I invite IOC Member States, which are current Members of the IOC Executive Council, to forward to the IOC Executive Secretary your positions on the proposal to postpone the 53rd session of the Executive Council, as well as on the proposed interim working methodologies, as early as possible please, and by 3 May 2020, at the latest. Decision on the proposals will be made in accordance to applicable RoP. I equally welcome all relevant comments from the recipients of this Circular Letter.

I thank you very much for your understanding and continuing support.

Yours sincerely,

Ariel Hernan Troisi
Chairperson