

HRH speech – FIBA Congress

23 August 2023

Dear President Niang, dear Secretary General Zagklis, dear dignitaries from the Philipinnes, Indonesia, and Japan, Excellencies, National Federations' Presidents and Secretaries General, dear Friends,

I am honoured to be here at the FIBA Congress to address you all in my role as founding chairman of the FIBA Safeguarding Council.

As I am sure we all agree, safeguarding is a vitally important subject; A subject that all of us in sport have a great responsibility to address.

And FIBA should be commended for taking such a proactive approach in creating this safeguarding council.

Working with my colleagues, I am committed to ensuring that FIBA does everything possible to protect and support its athletes and all stakeholders.

As many of you will be aware, for a long time I have been a passionate advocate and activist for the improvement of safeguarding in sport – both the prevention of, and the appropriate response to harassment and abuse in sport.

I have set up and been involved in many commissions and committees focused on strengthening safeguarding, including as chair of the IOC's new Working Group on Safeguarding.

And great strides have been made both inside and outside of sport.

That includes work done by the IOC, by International Federations such as FIBA and by many other organisations across the world.

But there is still much, much more to be done.

It is not something that we can change overnight. It takes many years of hard work to simply get us to a point where robust systems and processes exist to protect the vulnerable.

This is why, and I make no apologies for repeating myself, safeguarding and the provision of safe sport should remain a top priority for ALL organisations in EVERY country.

Harassment and abuse are a violation of human rights. If we safeguard people in and around sport, we can truly harness the power of sport for humanity.

Because sport brings numerous physical and mental health benefits for everyone.

It can promote social inclusion, cohesion and interaction.

It can positively contribute to social change.

It can help us to foster more peaceful, equal and inclusive societies.

But all this brings an enormous amount of responsibility to those running sports.

We must ensure that everyone – children and adults, athletes and coaches – has access to safe, inclusive and accessible sporting environments.

We can also use sport and the unique power that it possesses in society to create a safer and more inclusive world.

If there is any doubt as to the importance of safeguarding, listen to these figures.

Reports and research from elite athletes across the world indicates that the minimum prevalence rate for sexual abuse in sport is 13%.

That is the minimum rate. Other studies have found much higher figures.

The rate for other forms of abuse is indicated to be much higher still.

Safeguarding must remain a top priority for all organisations.

And FIBA's commitment to safeguarding is clear for us all to see.

It is why I was delighted to join the Safeguarding Council as founding chair.

Especially with four of the seven members – including myself – not affiliated with FIBA.

That means we are neutral. We are unbiased. We are able to offer advice impartially.

The speed with which FIBA moved to finalise their Safeguarding Policy in the second half of 2022 showed your commitment.

To have FIBA, the International Federation for one of the most popular sports in the Olympic Movement, take responsibility in this manner sets a fantastic example for other IFs.

More importantly for those of us here, it sets a fantastic example to you, the National Federations.

While FIBA is able to set guidelines and policy, to advise you all on how best to approach safeguarding, it has to be implemented at a local level.

This is a key focus of the work that I am leading with the IOC Safeguarding Working Group, in which FIBA is represented. We are working to establish independent systems and structures to support and assist with the strengthening of safeguarding in sport at the local level.

Change is coming.

And we need National Federations to drive this forward to ensure safeguarding is considered at every club.

That is every National Federation around the world because this is a global issue.

During my involvement with safeguarding, I have seen incidents in all corners of the world.

Nobody should believe that their country is free from issues in this area.

The responsibility falls on all of us.

Much work is being done to ensure that organisations have the tools to prevent abuse, and to ensure that when enough trust is gained for those harmed in sport to come forward, organisations know what to do to safeguard their wellbeing and ensure appropriate responses.

Again, this is a key element of the work being done by the IOC, in collaboration with Olympic Movement stakeholders. Make no mistake, building the trust for those harmed to come forward is essential. Without that, harm continues to occur and to proliferate.

Thus, when we talk about safe sport, we are also talking about the future of sport. The future of basketball.

Children, the next generation of stars, need to have a safe and inclusive environment to fall in love with the game.

They might love watching basketball. But if they don't have a safe space to play, then you risk losing them to other sports.

The stringent, zero tolerance policies that FIBA has put in place will ensure this does not happen.

It is underpinned by the updated Basic Principles of Good Governance of the Olympic Movement, released in 2022.

This requires all members of the Olympic Movement to reflect in their respective rules, regulations, policies and operations the need for "a zero-tolerance approach to breaches of safeguarding principles adopted in all sports organisations at all levels".

It also states the requirement to have an established, published safe sport strategy.

Tomorrow morning there is a dedicated breakout session to discuss safeguarding.

I will visit the session and I encourage everyone to attend.

Sharing learnings and experiences is vitally important.

This will ensure that we continue to adapt and are able to provide the safest environments moving forward.

Let me finish by thanking FIBA for returning to Asia for this World Cup

Our continent is passionate about basketball, and it is an honour for us to host a second successive World Cup

In four years' time, we will see the first FIBA World Cup in the Arabic world in Qatar.

That is an event I am already excited for, and we know they will put on a great show.

But first, I look forward to the competition starting.

Good luck to all the competing countries and thank you for allowing me to speak to you today.