

Your Excellency the President of the Republic,  
The President of the Senate,  
The President of the International Olympic Committee,  
The members of the IOC,  
The members of the Junta and the Board of CONI,  
The Authorities present,  
Olympic and Paralympic Champions,  
Friends of Sport

Today is an historic event. Thank you all for being here.

A hundred years have passed since in a hall at Montecitorio Palace a group of officials who were armed with great cultural, social and political passion decided to establish CONI, the Italian National Olympic Committee. It was the night between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1914. That night a story was born. An infinite, beautiful, fascinating exalting story, and certainly a reason for pride for the whole country. The story of CONI is also the history of Italy. The links that over the years sport has had with the vicissitudes of our Nation are innumerable and sport has been able to carve out for itself that true and proper consideration thanks above all to these athletes, Olympic and Paralympic, who here today gratify us with their presence and who have honoured the Country in the four corners of the world in this first century of life.

A century in which sport has intertwined with the events that have befallen the Country, some also tragic, but that it has been able to overcome thanks to the intuition, the intelligence and the farsightedness of my predecessors. Today I am a privileged person – with respect to those who preceded me, equally protagonists of this event – I have the possibility of living as President of CONI this very particular recurrence.

But it is right to recall that, if we are here today to celebrate our first hundred years, we owe it to Giulio Onesti who, in an historic moment for our Country, with Italy still wounded by World War II, found the strength, the courage and the capacity to

launch anew an entity that should have been liquidated but which he instead rebuilt and made credible to the eyes of the international community.

That community, which in the world of sport is represented by the International Olympic Committee, to which go my truly warmest thanks for attending our celebrations, first and foremost President Thomas Bach, a great friend of Italy, to the IOC Members present with us today to show us their friendship and affection, to the Presidents of the International Federations and the over eighty representatives of National Olympic Committees from across the world.

In these hundred years Italy has won for itself on the field of play unquestionable prestige, which is recognised us at all levels and that transforms itself into esteem and consideration at home from both the Governments and the Parliaments that have succeeded each other in our Republic.

With this celebration we want to underline also the close relationship that CONI has kept over time with art and culture recognising merit to those who have wanted to exalt the merits of sport. The area of the Foro Italico where we daily work is testimony to the strong ties we have with the city of Rome. The selfsame Casa delle Armi, the fencing hall by Luigi Moretti, here before you, represents our constant commitment in enhancing and recovering artistic and architectural patrimony.

We represent a population of twelve million people including members and those who practice sport, ninety thousand associations, who recognise themselves in and identify themselves with the athletes, the technical staff, the competition officials and judges, the National Sports Federations, Olympic and not, in the Associated Sports Disciplines, in the Sports Promoting Bodies and meritorious Associations. We are a great family, the family of Sport.

A family towards which you, Mr President, have always shown attention and special sentiment, and for this we want to express our public gratitude.

We all remember with great admiration when you attended the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games in London in 2012 and the inauguration of Casa Italia despite the profound sorrow for the loss of a loved one; and all those times when you welcomed us at the Quirinale with the Olympic and Paralympic Athletes before and after the Games.

But – if you allow me – I owe special THANKS to our athletes who are our pride and joy, our strength. They are those who have flown the Italian flag across the world to the tune of our national anthem. It is they who are “the Gold of Italy”. I cannot mention them all by name, but I want to encompass them in these few words: “they are the Italy that wins!”

I won't hide the fact that, looking into the eyes of the 130 gold medallists here today, champions of all ages, old and young, able and disabled, two sentiments are those that I feel most strongly: a great emotion and great respect.

Emotion because our memories inevitably dive back to the many, many victories that Italian sport has given our Country.

Respect because after so many years, Italy can be proud and honoured to have taken to the world a winning message that time cannot erase, and indeed helps keep it impressed upon our hearts.

And as are also indelible the three memorable Olympic Games that we have had the honour to host and the skill to organise. Cortina 1956, Rome 1960 and Torino 2006 have seen the Olympic Flame burn and those last three torch bearers are here with us today: Guido Caroli, Giancarlo Peris and Stefania Belmondo, three athletes that are symbols with whom we want to share those unforgettable moments and – through sport – exhort the whole world to look positively to the future.

A future that can link Italy to the five circles evermore.

I believe that not many know that CONI and the Olympic Flag, that you see here hoisted on the flagpole, are the same age. They were both born in 1914 just a few months the one from the other.

I take this coincidence to be a sign of destiny. A history that can continue to give a great number of rewards if we can be a team, if we can unite the strengths of our Nation, of our Capital, with the Government, the City, but above all you, who represent the unity of the Country.

Thank you Mr President, thank you all, for this unforgettable day!