

IPC Biennial Report 2013-2015

Good morning everyone,

Since the last General Assembly in Athens in 2013, the IPC and Paralympic Movement have enjoyed many highlights including celebrating our 25th anniversary in Berlin in October 2014.

Over the next 30 minutes or so I will go over key achievements and challenges from the last two years and provide an update on each of the IPC's six strategic goals.

Much of what I will cover was included in the IPC Biennial Report which was circulated to the IPC membership last month.

1) Consolidate the Paralympic Games as a premier sporting event

You heard yesterday from the Organising Committees of the next four Paralympic Games, as well as Sochi 2014, so I will not dwell too long covering the same ground as them. I would however like to tell you a little bit more about each edition from an IPC viewpoint.

Sochi 2014

Sochi 2014 set the bar high for all future Paralympic Winter Games organising committees breaking multiple records:

- A record 550 athletes from 45 countries took part
- A record cumulative audience of 2.1 billion people watched the Games thanks to broadcasters in 55 countries showing more hours of coverage than ever before
- A record 316,200 tickets were sold, 86,000 more than Vancouver 2010
- The IPC website received 400,000 visitors in 10 days, a 530 per cent increase on years earlier. A further 2.5 million watched the Games on YouTube.

There were many stand-out features from Sochi 2014 but one in particular was athletic performance. Many of the star performers were recognised at last night's Paralympic Sport and Media Awards and rightly so; their performances really did inspire and excite the world.

One of the other highlights for me was the USA versus Russia gold medal match in ice sledge hockey. It was a fantastic match and was shown live on NBC, the first time a US gold medal win has been shown live in the country. One weakness of the London 2012 Paralympics was the lack of TV coverage in the US, so I am delighted at NBC and NBC Sports Network's 66 hours of coverage from Sochi.

Away from sport, Sochi's biggest impact was on society. The city's election as hosts in 2007 led to Russian authorities and society paying attention to the issue of inclusion for the first time.

New legislation was passed at the highest levels of Government and the Sochi 2014 Organising Committee created a barrier-free infrastructure, ensuring that everything built for the Games was accessible.

Sochi is now a blueprint for the rest of Russia, with 200 cities already using what was created for the Games as a guide for furthering their own accessibility.

As was well documented at the time, there was a lot of political unrest at the time of the Games with Russia annexing the Crimea immediately after the Closing Ceremony. As a result, there were rumours of teams considering quitting the Games in protest.

Had any team left it would have been an absolute tragedy for the whole Paralympic Movement. Sport must always prevail over politics, and I would like to thank and congratulate the Ukrainian Paralympic Committee, led by Valeriy Suskevich, for staying and competing at Sochi 2014. I know your decision to stay was at first unpopular back home, but your athletes who won 25 medals during the Games, changed public opinion and all returned to Kiev as heroes.

Rio 2016

With just under 10 months to go, I am fully confident that Latin America's first Paralympic Games will break new ground for the Paralympic Movement and help to build on the successes of London 2012 and Sochi 2014.

As you saw yesterday, building work is progressing at a rapid speed and the Games infrastructure is 92 per cent ready for the 4,350 athletes from 180 countries who will compete there in 22 sports.

The Rio 2016 Organising Committee aims to sell 3.3 million tickets, half a million more than London 2012, and should this target be achieved then the Paralympic Games will overtake the FIFA World Cup as the world's second biggest sporting event.

To further encourage international ticket sales, Jet Set Sports and sister company CoSport were recently appointed as the IPC's Global Authorised Ticket Reseller (ATR), offering a range of ticket and ticket-inclusive package offerings in over 160 countries and I am delighted they are here joining us this weekend.

In addition to attracting more spectators, Rio 2016 is also set to be the most watched with more broadcasters signed up to show the Games than ever before. TV images are set to be transmitted to over 120 countries and it is fully expected the Paralympic Games will reach a cumulative TV audience of more than four billion people for the first time.

The Rio 2016 Paralympic Games are already delivering a number of legacies. This summer Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff signed off the Inclusion of People with Disabilities Act that eliminates accessibility barriers in transport, housing, services, education, sport and the exercise of citizenship.

At the same time, she also announced that she was increasing the amount of funding the Brazilian Paralympic Committee receives from federal lotteries from EUR 20 million per year to around EUR 43 million. This additional funding will help support the new purpose built Brazilian Paralympic Training Centre which is set to open in Sao Paulo later this year catering for 15 Paralympic sports.

The Games are also acting as a catalyst to improve accessibility in and around Rio, a city that because of its topography can be tricky to get around. EUR 900,000 is being spent making many of the city's tourist attractions accessible before the opening ceremony and I hope this good work continues, before, during and after the Games.

Ahead of next year's event, Rio 2016 still faces some notable challenges.

The IPC, IOC, Rio 2016 and World Health Organisation (WHO) are working closely to ensure that no health risk is posed to athletes competing in canoe, rowing, sailing and triathlon next year. The health and well-being of athletes is the IPC's number one priority at all times, and currently the WHO state the water quality is safe for open water events. Between now and the Games, a number of steps will be taken to further improve water quality.

Brazil is also currently experiencing its worst economic downturn for 25 years. Although public support for the Games remains strong, the Rio 2016 Organising Committee is reluctant to rely on government funding in order to avoid the public protests that were seen before and during the 2014 FIFA World Cup. The financial downturn may hamper ticket sales.

The IPC is also working closely with Rio 2016 and the city government to ensure Paralympic transport lanes will be in use during the Games as these have yet to be confirmed by both parties.

PyeongChang 2018

In addition to what was presented by POCOG yesterday, I'd just like to add that in June the IPC Governing Board approved that Pyeong Chang 2018 will feature up to 670 athletes, 24 per cent more than Sochi 2014, and a 44 per cent increase in female participation.

Athletes will compete in 80 medal events with the medals programme for alpine skiing, biathlon, cross-country skiing, ice sledge hockey and wheelchair curling remaining unchanged from Sochi. The wheelchair curling competition will be expanded from 10 to 12 mixed teams, whilst snowboard will be a standalone sport, provisionally featuring 10 medal events.

Tokyo 2020

The Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games are on course to propel the Paralympic Movement to new levels in many areas including commercial support and TV coverage.

Since winning the right to host the Games, Tokyo 2020 has been extremely impressive in how they have gone about planning and preparing for the Paralympic Games.

In January 2016, the IPC finalised the Tokyo 2020 sports programme following an 18-month-long process and review of each sport. The final programme includes 22 sports; badminton and taekwondo will feature for the first time. Football 7-a-side and sailing have not been included as both failed to meet the minimum criteria for the number of nations widely and regularly practicing the sport as clearly outlined by the IPC Handbook.

In terms of legacy, the Japanese government have designated 10 event specific training centre facilities across the country to develop the abilities and performances of athletes ahead of the Games.

In June 2015, the launch of The Nippon Foundation Paralympic Support Centre was announced following a donation 10 billion Japanese from The Nippon Foundation. The Support Centre will endeavour to create an environment where para-athletes can focus fully on their sports, train qualified volunteers for Paralympics, raise public awareness of Paralympics, and conduct academic research. It will also support para-sports in developing countries.

Beijing 2022

In 2022 Beijing will be the first city ever to stage both the summer and winter Paralympics. The IPC hopes the Beijing 2022 can take the Winter Games to new height and do for the Paralympic Winter Games what Beijing 2008 did for the summer Games.

It is also hoped China can grow participation in winter para-sports, win their first Paralympic winter medal, and use para-sport to make for a more inclusive Chinese society.

Last month, the IPC launched the application process for sports to be included in the Beijing 2022 Paralympic Winter Games. A maximum of seven sports can be included and a final decision on the programme will be taken by the IPC Governing Board on 5 September 2016.

Last week, IPC CEO Xavier Gonzalez was present at the Beijing 2022 IOC Orientation Seminar where he presented the IPC's aspiration for the Games. The IPC's Orientation Seminar with Beijing 2022 is scheduled for late January 2016.

2) Empower para-athletes and support the development of para-sports

Yesterday morning, Georg Schlachtenburger and Xavi Gonzalez gave you a full update on the activities and governance structure of the Agitos Foundation, the IPC's development arm, so I won't repeat what he said but would like to thank Georg and his staff on your behalf for the tremendous work that they undertake.

Instead I will inform you of a number of other activities that have taken place away from the Agitos Foundation.

Last month, around 260 sport scientists, academics and researchers attended the seventh and biggest ever IPC VISTA conference in Girona, Spain.

The theme was "Securing the future for young para-athletes" and the three-day long conference included a world class line-up of guest speakers. In recognition of her role in the successful re-inclusion of intellectually impaired athletes into the Paralympic Games, Canadian professor Jennifer Mactavish was awarded with the 2015 Paralympic Scientific Award. It was also announced that Toronto, Canada, a city that staged a hugely successful Parapan American Games in August, will stage VISTA in 2017.

This afternoon, I am delighted to say that one of the motions that will be put forward for approval is the new IPC 2017 Athlete Classification Code. Thousands of comments from various stakeholders were received during the two-year-long review process. I would like to thank all those who contributed and also congratulate the IPC Classification Committee, led by Chairperson Anne Hart, for producing this new Athlete Classification Code which is more accessible and athlete focussed. I hope it gives a greater understanding of the subject and the processes involved for all.

The new IPC Anti-Doping Code was published on 1 January 2015 and the IPC received a very favourable report from WADA, the World Anti-Doping Agency, praising the team's work at the Sochi 2014 Paralympic Winter Games.

In 2014, nine athletes committed anti-doping violations, seven of which came in powerlifting, whilst so far this year three athletes have received suspensions for anti-doping offences.

I am pleased to say that an education campaign which aims to address the high number of anti-doping violations in powerlifting appears to be paying dividends. Launched in 2013 with funding from the Agitos Foundation, “Raise the Bar – Say No! to Doping” targets athletes and coaches. Fingers crossed, there has not been one anti-doping violation in the sport for the last four major competitions, and I think this programme could now act as a blueprint for other sports.

The IPC Athletes’ Council has met four times in the last two years. In March 2014, Eskil Hagen, Katja Saarinen and Mikhail Terentiev were appointed to the Council and later that year Dutch sitting volleyball player Elvira Stinissen was elected as the new Vice Chair. This October, members of Athletes’ Council met with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Athletes’ Commission at the IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland, as part of the IOC International Athletes’ Forum.

The aim of the meeting was to strengthen the ongoing relationship between athletes from both Movements, who are responsible for representing the views of all the world’s Olympians and Paralympians.

Athlete Forum have also been held in all IPC sports giving athletes an opportunity to give feedback and share their views on the future of their sport.

The IPC’s Proud Paralympian campaign, which aims to support para-athletes to be the best that they can be, living the Paralympic values, both on and off the field of play, continues to gain momentum. Targeting Paralympians and para-athletes who aspire to compete in Paralympic Games, education modules are designed to support their development as athletes, but also as individuals and active citizens.

3) Improve the recognition and value of the Paralympic brand

In an effort to increase the TV coverage of the Paralympics and para-sport events in between the Games, the IPC has continued to sell TV rights on behalf of the Paralympic Games Organising Committees.

The strategy of selling the rights for Sochi 2014 and Rio 2016 as a two Games deal for broadcasters has been a huge success. Sochi 2014 broke the cumulative two billion audience barrier for the first time, and I think this graphic perfectly illustrates the success we have enjoyed selling the rights for Rio.

These two images compare the broadcast deals we had in place with 500 days to go both before the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Paralympic Games. As you can see for London, with 500 days to go we only had Channel 4 and BBC Radio signed covering Great Britain. For Rio, we have more countries signed up than ever before and we are confident that we will break the four billion cumulative audience for the first time.

Since this graphic was made, Globo Group was announced as the broadcaster in Brazil and we are still in negotiations with a number of other broadcasters around the world.

This June, we announced our biggest ever TV deal with Japanese broadcaster NHK who has a long history of screening Paralympic sport. The channel will continue to show the Paralympics, and many other sport events in between, until at least 2024. Already this year they have covered the IPC Swimming and IPC Athletics World Championships.

The IPC has also partnered with Japan's leading pay TV broadcaster Wowow to produce a series of athlete focussed documentaries between now and the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. The broadcaster has already started filming with leading athletes from many sports and this approach is helping to compliment the IPC's Ones to Watch initiative.

For 2018, the IPC will act as the broadcast rights selling agency on behalf of the Organising Committee, whilst for Tokyo 2020 the IPC will not only own the rights, but also sell them.

Many of you will be aware that earlier this year, the IOC awarded all TV and multiplatform Olympic broadcast rights in Europe to Discovery for the period 2018-2024. Following this announcement, the IPC met with both the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and Discovery and will continue to liaise with both parties to develop a model for the Paralympic Games which best benefits the Paralympic Movement.

The IPC's digital channels and media interest in the Paralympic Movement outside of the Paralympic Games continues to grow.

In 2014, as a result of the Sochi Paralympic Winter Games, the IPC website attracted 2.8 million visitors, 36 per cent more than 2013. This year, the site is again set to break all records and has already had 2.5 million visitors, the most ever for a non-Paralympic Games year.

This graph illustrates the impressive growth of the IPC website since 2010 until present day.

The site is now firmly established as the world's number one para-sport website.

With Rio 2016 fast approaching, the growing interest in the Paralympic Movement is best shown in this table which compares the number of website visitors to www.paralympic.org in the months leading up to London 2012 and Rio 2016.

As you can see, the site now averages around 500 per cent more visitors than it did at the same stage leading up to London.

The increase in visitor numbers to www.paralympic.org is in part due to the success of the IPC's volunteer writer programme which was mentioned yesterday.

In terms of social media, the IPC's Facebook accounts have grown 15 per cent this year, whilst the Twitter following has increased by 27 per cent. More than 5.3 million videos have been viewed on the IPC's YouTube channel, with over 22.5 million minutes of action viewed. The IPC now manages 32 different online channels, reaching more than 340 million people alone this year.

On 3 December, the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the IPC and USOC will launch a major 10-month-long PR and communications campaign which aims to raise awareness of para-sport in the US in the lead-up to Rio 2016.

Working with of the world's leading PR firms, run by WPP's Sir Martin Sorrell, the campaign is based around research which highlights the US's negative attitudes towards impairment and how the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games can improve those attitudes for the better.

High profile launch events will be staged in Washington DC, New York and eight other US cities.

4) Build sustainable funding

Through a prudent approach to managing its finances, the IPC continues to generate a small surplus each year which goes towards its reserves.

As the IPC's Finance Director Ulf Herzer will be presenting on this subject shortly, I will not steal his thunder and will allow him to talk about the IPC's financial position in more detail.

What I will say is the IPC's financial position has been helped by the strength of the US Dollar against the Euro, tax efficiencies and an increase in revenues from marketing and broadcasting, more of which I will tell you about shortly when I cover fostering key strategic partnerships.

5) Shape Organisational Capability

In early 2015, the IPC published its Strategic Plan 2015-2018 in French, German and Spanish, and English. The plan aims to consolidate the growth of the Paralympic Games, increase global participation in para-sport and improve the recognition and value of the Paralympic brand.

Developed during 2014 and 2015, the IPC consulted many stakeholders including those who attended last October's IPC Membership Gathering in Berlin. On behalf of the Governing Board, I would like to thank all of you who contributed to this new plan which is centred on six strategic goals. These are:

- Consolidate the Paralympic Games as a premier sporting event
- Empower para-athletes and support the development of para-sports
- Improve the recognition and value of the Paralympic brand
- Build sustainable funding
- Shape organisational capability
- Foster key strategic partnerships

To coincide with the launch of the new plan, the IPC developed a new aspiration "*To make for a more inclusive society for people with an impairment through para-sport,*" which reflects the Paralympic Movement's track record of helping to change attitudes towards people with an impairment.

The IPC's vision was also updated. "*To enable para-athletes to achieve sporting excellence and inspire and excite the world,*" highlights that the vision applies to para-athletes at all levels from the grassroots to the high performance level and not solely to Paralympians who compete at the Paralympic Games.

In line with the growth of the Paralympic Movement, the IPC workforce has increased to 78 full-time staff. This includes 53 people in core IPC departments, 18 in IPC sports and seven in the Agitos Foundation. The 78 members of staff are made up of 35 men and 43 women, and 23 nationalities. Women hold one in three leadership positions and four members of staff have an impairment.

Last month, half of the IPC workforce moved into a new building located next door to the IPC headquarters having spent the last two years in an office 1km away.

The IPC membership now has more than 200 members, including the new members who were ratified this morning. Four NPCs are currently suspended, and, as you heard this morning, a number more have had their membership terminated.

The IPC Governing Board met three times this year in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in Tokyo, Japan, and most recently here in Mexico City this week.

In January in Abu Dhabi, the Governing Board approved the composition of four IPC Standing Committees – Women in Sport, Development, Education and Paralympic Games. Each Committee features at least one athlete member and many of the newly appointed committees met for the first time this May in Germany.

During June's Governing Board meeting it was announced that Tokyo 2020 will be the fourth Organising Committee to benefit from the fourth edition of the IPC Academy Excellence Programme. The partnership will see the IPC Academy deliver a range of knowledge workshops across the next five years, and is geared towards enhancing the planning and delivery of the 2020 Paralympic Games.

6) Foster key strategic partnerships

Following the election of Thomas Bach as IOC President in September 2013, relations between the IPC and our most important strategic partner continue to flourish. I now have the opportunity to meet President Bach at least once a quarter which highlights the closeness of our working relationship.

At December 2014's IOC Extraordinary Session in Monaco for Olympic Agenda 2020 President Bach highlighted our ever improving relationship.

"We [the IOC] enjoy an excellent co-operation with the IPC. The relationship and co-operations are so good that there was no need to recommend changes in this document [Olympic Agenda 2020]. That is why you do not find a recommendation on this policy in the Olympic Agenda 2020."

With the current IPC/IOC agreement running until the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, the IPC has signed a principle agreement that covers the Beijing 2022 Paralympic Winter Games.

This agreement provides us with time to negotiate a much longer term co-operation agreement with the IOC that aims to address some of the challenges we currently face under the existing partnership.

Since the signing of the last agreement in July 2012, the IPC and IOC have collaborated on a number of projects and this will continue further under Olympic Agenda 2020. Going forward the IPC will work closer with the IOC on the management of the Paralympic Games ensuring an integrated approach to the Games covering everything from the bidding phase right through to their delivery.

In May, President Bach announced widespread changes to IOC commissions; the result was greater involvement for representatives of the Paralympic Movement, full details of which can be found in the Biennial Report that was circulated to the membership last month.

Away from the IOC, the IPC has also worked with the United Nations on a number of mutually beneficial projects and events.

In April, I spoke at a special United Nations event in New York, USA, to mark the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace. I informed the audience of my belief that the Paralympic Games are now the world's number one sporting event for driving social inclusion.

Dr. Cheri Blauwet, Chairperson of the IPC Medical Committee, also spoke at the event about her own experiences for driving social inclusion.

Over the last two years, the IPC's sponsorship portfolio has expanded. Panasonic joined as an Official World-wide Partner until at least the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games and BP agreed to become an IPC International Partner until the end of 2016. Samsung also extended its worldwide partnership with the IPC through to Tokyo 2020, whilst Allianz became the first global partner of IPC Athletics.

The IPC is currently in negotiations with a number of potential partners and is optimistic about concluding agreements shortly that will benefit the whole of the Paralympic Movement.

This success is, in part, due to the appointment of Dentsu Inc. who have been brought on board by the IPC to maximise commercial opportunities ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

The five year agreement gives Dentsu the exclusive rights to sell partnership and sponsorship packages to Japanese companies for all 10 summer and winter sports that the IPC acts as the International Federation for.

In October, HRH Grand Duchess Maria Teresa of Luxembourg hosted the biennial IPC Honorary Board. The Board was updated on the success of Sochi 2014, continued growth of the Paralympic Movement and progress of the Agitos Foundation. This was the first Board meeting to take place following the resignation of HRH Princess Astrid of Belgium.

IPC Sports

All 10 IPC sports have continued to make strong progress in the last two years, in-line with their sport specific Strategic Plans that were published in 2013.

Each sport has worked hard to develop long-term competition calendars, increasing the number of competition opportunities for athletes. This has helped boost participation numbers across all summer sports and made them more commercially appealing for sponsors.

This year has been one of the busiest yet for IPC sports with multiple competitions organised across all sports.

The third IPC Athletics Grand Prix season saw meetings held in 10 countries across all five continents. The first IPC Athletics Marathon World Championships coincided with April's London Marathon and featured 120 athletes who broke three world records.

Doha, Qatar, staged the biggest ever IPC Athletics World Championships just two weeks ago, attracting 1,300 athletes from 95 countries. The event resulted in record media coverage, broadcast numbers and online figures.

Next March, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, will stage the first ever IPC Athletics Asia-Oceania Championships whilst Grosseto, Italy, will host the 2016 European Championships in June.

From 2016, wheelchair racers will also be part of the Abbott World Marathon Majors with one male and one female winner determined over a 12-month period based on scoring earned via results from six iconic global races. Each winner will be awarded USD 50,000.

Since 2013, athletics has seen an 18.9 per cent increase in participation.

This year IPC Swimming staged its World Championships in Glasgow, Great Britain, an event that attracted more TV and media coverage than ever before. Sixteen broadcasters from eight countries showed coverage of the event which saw Russia top the medals table and swimmers break 38 world records.

During the course of this season, we believe we have witnessed, and have heard of, a number of cases of alleged Intentional Misrepresentation during the classification evaluation process of athletes. We fear this alleged misconduct may have been encouraged by the athletes' support personnel. The IPC treats Intentional Misrepresentation as a serious offence, carrying a penalty of a two-year suspension, and in August wrote to all NPCs regarding the matter.

In 2016, Funchal, Portugal, will host the 2016 IPC Swimming European Open Championships between 30 April and 7 May, and the sport will look to build on the 3.7 per cent increase in participation from the last two years.

The IPC sport enjoying the biggest growth is powerlifting which has witnessed a 71 per cent increase in participation since 2012. This includes a 37.7 per cent increase over the last two years in the number of licensed female athletes.

The increase in numbers is a result of more World Cup and regional Championships. This year's Americas Open Championships were staged in Mexico City in April and the Asia Open Championships took place in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Both events involved a record number of athletes. Later this month, Eger, Hungary, will stage the European Open Championships, again drawing a record number of entrants.

Since 2013, IPC Shooting has grown participation by 6.6 per cent. In 2014 the sport staged its biggest ever World Championships in Suhl, Germany, involving 265 athletes from 53 countries. By the end of 2015, six IPC Shooting World Cups will have been staged, with three of them acting as Rio 2016 qualifiers. In order to grow participation further, the sport is also working to develop para-clay target shooting as a new shooting para-sport discipline, and to create a development pathway for visually impaired shooting.

IPC Wheelchair Dance Sport has offered more competition opportunities than ever before in 2015. Last week the sport held its World Championships in Rome, Italy, involving 157 athletes from 23 countries, three of which – Georgia, Hungary and Sri Lanka – are competing for the first time.

In winter sports, Cable, USA, hosted the 2015 IPC Biathlon and Cross-country skiing World Championships in January, featuring 135 athletes from 15 countries. In February, La Molina, Spain, hosted the first ever IPC Snowboard World Championships. Forty-two athletes from 18 countries took part. Not only did the season include the successful introduction of banked slalom events and head-to-head snowboard cross, but the classification category for lower-limb impaired athletes was split into two classes.

Russia topped the medals table at March's IPC Alpine Skiing World Championships in Panorama, Canada. More than 100 athletes from 23 countries took part in the event. In terms

of media coverage, the event was a great success with over 1,000 pieces of media coverage secured.

A long term partnership agreement between IPC Alpine Skiing and LISKI was signed until 2018. Liski will continue to provide IPC Alpine Skiing with all necessary products for the sport, such as start tents, support poles, slalom poles and protection mattresses.

USA won gold on home ice at the 2015 IPC Ice Sledge Hockey World Championships A-Pool which was staged in Buffalo. Large crowds and live TV coverage on NBC Sports Network were standout features of the even. BBC World News broadcast daily bulletins from Buffalo to its global audience of 230 million people.

Staying with ice sledge hockey, March's B-Pool World Championships, in Ostersund, Sweden, were won by South Korea.

To further develop the sport, IPC Ice Sledge Hockey held its first youth camp in late October in Germany thanks to support from the German Federal Ministry of the Interior. Twenty five aspiring players from eight countries, aged between 14-21 years, took part.

Following the first IPC Ice Sledge Hockey International Women's Cup in November 2014, further fixtures for women's teams are set to take place in late 2015.

As you have heard, there has been a lot of good work that has been undertaken since 2013. I would like to thank the IPC membership, IPC management team and all volunteers for playing their role in the making the Paralympic Movement the strongest it has ever been.

The priority now is to use the new IPC Strategic Plan to build on these foundations.

Together, we must deliver a hugely successful Paralympic Games in Rio next year and show to the world that Beijing 2008 and London 2012 were not exceptions, but the norm.

We must also continue to engage more people around the world in the Paralympic Movement, either as participants in para-sport, TV viewers at home or spectators in venues.

Only by more people getting involved in what we do and what we deliver on a daily basis can we help fulfil the IPC aspiration: *"To make for a more inclusive society for people with an impairment through para-sport."*

Thank you.