Excellencies, Ministers, distinguished colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion.

I speak today as the IOC's Senior Manager for Safeguarding and as a long-standing member of the Council of Europe Pool of Safeguarding Expert, but also as an Olympian who experienced severe sexual abuse in sport as a child.

I know first-hand the extraordinary opportunities, friendships and sense of belonging that sport can provide. But I also know how devastating the consequences can be when the protections fail.

Sport has the power to improve lives. But with that power comes a responsibility to ensure that sport is safe for everyone, particularly children.

I arrived in Monaco yesterday from Dakar, where the Youth Olympic Games are taking place, bringing together thousands of young athletes, all under 18. The YOG place particular emphasis on the experience and the personal development of young athletes, beyond sporting performance.

During the Olympic Games and Youth Olympic Games, the IOC works closely with the Organising Committee, National Olympic Committees and International Federations, supported by their safeguarding and

mental health professionals, to deliver a comprehensive safeguarding programme combining prevention, education and appropriate response to concerns.

While safeguarding measures are implemented at all Olympic Games, they are strengthened at the Youth Olympic Games to address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of athletes under 18.

At the YOG, through age-appropriate activities, young athletes learn to recognise inappropriate behaviours and understand that asking for help is a sign of strength, not a weakness. They also have access to dedicated safeguarding and mental health services, confidential reporting channels, mental health support and spaces to disconnect and recharge.

For the first time at the YOG, we are also implementing our Cyber Abuse Protection Service, following its deployment at Paris 2024 and Milano Cortina 2026, to help protect athletes also from online harassment and abuse.

Athletes also receive a gratitude journal, built around the principle that they are “more than their performance”, and designed to encourage reflection, emotional check-ins and self-awareness, while providing practical tools to support wellbeing and resilience.

Our ambition is simple: every athlete should enjoy their Olympic experience feeling safe, respected and supported.

Our commitment to safeguarding extends well beyond the Olympic Games. The IOC works with National Olympic Committees and International Federations to help them strengthen their safeguarding capacity through education, training, expert support and practical guidance.

This growing global capacity is essential to ensuring that safeguarding is embedded throughout the athlete journey. While international sport organisations can provide guidance and expertise, safeguarding must ultimately be delivered at national and local level, in accordance with national legal frameworks and with consideration for local languages and socio-cultural contexts.

This work reflects a broader ambition. As part of the IOC's new Fit for the Future strategic direction, which will guide the Olympic Movement through to 2032, which priorities integrity and healthy sport environments.

Sport is widely recognised for its contribution to physical and mental health, social inclusion and personal development. Yet these benefits are not automatic.

A child experiencing humiliation, discrimination, harassment, neglect or abuse may suffer consequences extending far beyond sport.

As a member of the Council of Europe's Pool of International Experts on Safeguarding in Sport, I value the opportunity to work with experts across the region to help advance this shared agenda. The Pool of international experts on safe sport comprises 40 senior child-safeguarding experts who advise EPAS and help develop guidance and training tools, particularly through the Start to Talk project. It has also contributed to the conference contents and the draft resolution.

Governments and sport organisations have distinct but complementary responsibilities - not competing ones.

The autonomy of sport goes hand in hand with responsibility. We therefore welcome the emphasis placed on safeguarding requirements for sport organisations in the resolution expected to be adopted by Ministers later today.

The role of governments is essential in establishing legal frameworks, strengthening child protection systems and ensuring access to specialist services, particularly when concerns involve potential criminal offences. This requires effective cooperation between sport organisations, child protection authorities, healthcare services and law

enforcement, with clear referral pathways so that no child falls through the gaps.

I would like to leave you with one final thought.

We often speak about the power of sport to change lives. I believe deeply in that power. But if we truly want sport to change children's lives for the better, we must ensure that sport never becomes a place where their trust, dignity or wellbeing are compromised.

Every child deserves to experience the joy of sport without fear. And together, we have the responsibility to make that possible.

Gloria Viseras