FIFA®

Opening statement.

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- Sport is not immune from the ills of society: in other words, what happens outside sport also happens within it. For years, few from our sector were willing to acknowledge that, alongside its tremendous benefits, sport has a darker side, like any human activity.

- Despite progress, as this conference demonstrates, reluctance persists to openly acknowledge problems such as toxic coaching styles, fraudulent agents and the trafficking of aspiring elite athletes. In every sport in every region, predators target children, volunteers face harassment at sporting events, severe neglect occurs in some sports academies, among many other forms of harm and exploitation.

- Because there is a direct correlation, we will only be able to acknowledge **our duty of care and shared responsibility** to create safer sporting environments as a sector when we are ready to admit that these problems exist.

- As **football's global governing body and** the largest sports federation, FIFA acknowledges this duty of care. Our safeguarding work began back in 2018, with the Council of Europe involved from the outset, as my colleague noted earlier. Our current framework reflects our commitment to putting into practice the principles of the resolution to be tabled for adoption after this session. This of course includes prevention workstreams. On the response side, we are currently following up on approximately 100 safeguarding cases.

- Our strategy is to work with football and non-football partners across our ecosystem to drive systemic change. **To be clear, we work within the system to create sustainable change.**

- Even if we admit that we have achieved much since 2018, significant work and challenges remain, including a widespread **culture of impunity** at many levels. What we identify as "a safeguarding culture" is still far from being embedded in football organisations. In some of these organisations, people continue to harm boys and girls, women, and others, resulting with reasons in mistrust and a legitimate fear of retaliation. These understandable but **intangible barriers** are difficult to overcome—arguably one of our greatest challenges.

- **Leadership commitment** in every sports organisation should not be a ticking box exercise. It is fundamental. As a sport federation we have learned that training hundreds of individuals in safeguarding standards and developing policies will remain paper exercises without leadership buy-in. Education and training are indispensable, but insufficient on their own;

- While interestingly the opposite is true. We have seen positive change happening quite fast in some football organisations with no safeguarding/safe sport measures in place at the start, when the top leader showed real commitment and made the topic of safe sport/safeguarding an institutional priority.

- One final lesson learnt that I would like to share before I finalise this opening statement and we perhaps continue to discuss practical examples in the next hour: despite shortcomings in how sports organisations' disciplinary and ethics bodies handle reports, cases and incidents, I see an opportunity in the coexistence of state justice and sporting justice—a dual system non-existent in many sectors. From my perspective,

this deserves close attention and investment. We must continue working together to improve ethics and disciplinary processes to better treat and protect victims. Prevention is vital, but so are sanctions that, in the most serious cases, aim at excluding from sport those whose crimes destroy athletes' lives and dreams.

- No organisation can tackle this alone. Ministries, sports commissions, national and international sports federations, confederations, prosecutors, police and many others each have a role. I have learnt that cross-sector collaboration and intergovernmental initiatives are the most efficient way to create safer sporting environments for children and others.

THANK YOU.