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**Report by International Olympic Committee Vice  
President on his Trip to North Korea**

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**Summary:**

A report from IOC Vice President Kumar regarding his trip to North Korea. He addresses attempts to ease tensions between North Korea and South Korea over the staging of the 1988 Summer Olympics and to determine if the two countries would be able to work together on the event.

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

Transcript - English

REPORT BY MR. ASHWINI KUMAR, IOC VICE PRESIDENT, ON HIS TRIP TO  
NORTH KOREA

On 6th June 1985 at the conclusion of the 1985 IOC Session in Berlin, a meeting was arranged by the President, H.E. Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch, with the North Korean representative, Mr. Yu Sun Kim, Mr. Siperco and myself. In this meeting, North Korea was requested to attend a joint meeting with South Korea which was to be arranged by the IOC and would discuss the participation of the NOC of North Korea in the 1988 Seoul Games. Mr. Kim agreed in the Berlin meeting to discuss this matter with his NOC in Pyongyang as well as with his Party, following which he would let us know of the reactions of such a meeting. Accordingly, he sent a telex to the President on 8th July stating that in principle his NOC had agreed to such a joint meeting initiated by the IOC. Further, he informed the President that he would welcome Mr. Kumar, Second Vice President to visit Pyongyang for about four to seven days to discuss the matter further with him. I was, therefore, instructed by the President to proceed as soon as possible to Pyongyang and participate in these talks. The President also laid down the parameters within which the talks would be held:

i) Three sets of dates were to be suggest for the meeting in Lausanne - 4th to 5th September, 11th to 12th September or 8th to 9th October.

ii) The meeting would be attended, apart from the two delegations from North and South Korea, by the IOC President, the three Vice Presidents and the Ad Interim Administrator, Mr. Gafner. The Meeting would be held under the auspices of the IOC.

iii) A unified team representing Korea in the Games was not practicable but the two teams could march consecutively in the Opening Ceremony.

Also, the Games cannot be split between the two countries.

iv) The IOC would give all assurances on security etc. to facilitate North Korea's peaceful participation in the Games.

Pyongyang is a very difficult capital to reach as there is a plane service from Peking once a week and from Moscow also on a very restricted scale. Due to difficulties in booking, visas etc. I was, with very great difficulty, able to reach Pyongyang from Peking on 16th July.

On 16th, I was warmly received by Mr. Kim in Pyongyang and our talks started off almost immediately. Mr. Kim initiated the discussion by describing me as an old and loyal friend of North Korea who understood the problem of a military and political partition of one's motherland and which was still in force after 40 years and which aberration his Government was trying to rectify now by holding conciliatory talks with South Korea, particularly on the following subjects:

i) The Red Cross - the organisation which would deal with human problems like "free" visits to and from the two Koreas facilitating the meeting of separated families.

ii) Parliamentary delegations to discuss the reunification of a common parliament and country, and of the signing of a common non-aggression pact between North and South, and the future laws and constitution of a unified Korea.

iii) Joint measures on the economic front which would be of mutual benefit to both spheres.

In this context, Mr. Kim informed me that his Government and Party were [sic] also keen on having talks with the Olympic problem of participation in the 1988 Games. His party felt and had issued a manifesto on the subject which had its central idea from Fidel [sic] Castro's advice that there should be a unified organisation for the staging of the 1988 Olympic Games in which both Koreas had equal share. His Party also felt that this measure would strengthen the Olympic Movement and not weaken it as previous boycotts had done.

I thanked Mr. Kim for his kind and gracious hospitality, and informed him that lest our talks got bogged down later on the central issue, it should be clearly understood and comprehended that under no circumstances could the IOC Charter be infringed. Further, that the contract with Seoul City was sacrosanct and could not be violated. However, in the interest of peace and harmony, the IOC would agree to the two teams marching consecutively in the Opening Ceremony and perhaps also exhibit during the Games symbols of unity between the two Koreas in cultural activities such as singing, dance, drama and exhibitions. These views, however, did not impress Mr. Kim and he pressed his own point in a very determined manner. He informed me that as matters stood, the proposals of his party had already been circulated to all foreign capitals of the world and a copy had already been dispatched to President Samaranth.

Not wanting to get stuck on this point, I asked him that evening that if, theoretically, it was agreed to have a Unified Games, how would North Korea surmount the practical difficulties that would be thrown up concerning one residential village or where the Opening and Closing Ceremonies would be? About the tremendous number of technical hurdles that would arise from holding the Games at far-removed venues? Lastly, what about the difficulties which would be encountered by the International Sports Federations?

His reply which was cursory was that as in the past they could have more than one residential village and that the Opening Ceremony could be in one region and the Closing Ceremony in the other or perhaps by devising a quick means of transport most of these hurdles could be surmounted. The distance between Pyongyang and Seoul was only of three hours by car and half an hour by air. However, he refused to give the details and said that he would be ready with his answers in the meeting in Lausanne. He further told me that if the events could be shared equally free transit would be provided between the two regions. The more he argued the question, the more he realised that he was tying himself up in knots. He finally admitted that the difficulties which could be brought up by the observation of the Charter Rules would be insurmountable and one would have to think along fresh lines where legal hurdles did not exist. In principle, it would not come under the Charter Rules but under some ad hoc legislation. It was his belief that North Korea could provide much better facilities than the archaic ones which were provided by the Los Angeles Organising Committee.

Despite my repeated requests, Mr. Kim, in the next two days of our talks, could not provide any details about how his NOC would tackle the technical difficulties which would be generated by a unified organisation of the Games.

On the third day, I discreetly informed Mr. Kim that I would like to call on a senior member of the Party with whom I could discuss this matter further. He arranged a meeting between me and the First Vice President of the DPR Korea, Mr. Pak Song Chol. Mr. Chol welcomed me as an Indian belonging to a country which had fought colonialism and was now a leader of the non-aligned countries. His country and region, he deplored, was bedeviled by the occupation of more than [sic] 40,000 US troops whose sole intention was to keep the country divided and for this reason were masterminding the organisation of the Olympic Games so as to demonstrate to the world that North and South could never be one again and South Korea was a flourishing independent country. It was his belief that as this year North Korea was

celebrating 40 years of liberation of colonial rule, the people in the North would welcome a settlement on the participation in the Olympic question. In this context, he felt that in the long run, South Korea and the USA would not be able to keep Korea divided. In order to meet the demands of the common man on both sides, the two regions had had eight rounds of talks on the question of reunification and problems ranging from the Red Cross to economic wellbeing was eing [sic] discussed. It was therefore, imperative that a fair solution had to be evolved so that North Korea could with dignity attend the XXIVth Olympic Games. The proposals he said had already been circulated throughout the world and were briefly:

- i) A unified Korean organisation for running the XXIVth Olympic Games.
- ii) The equal sharing of events by both sides.
- iii) Naming the Games as "Korea Pyongyang Seoul Olympic Games" which could be held under common sponsorship of both regions.

He felt that the joint celebration of the Games would be fair and just for both the regions, and would prove to the world that the Olympic Game was an instrument of spreading peace and friendship. Further, it would diffuse tensions that where now almost at a breaking point. The presence in South Korea of 40,000 American troupes [sic] and which used that region as a military base would not be conducive to the holding of a peaceful games. Very few people in the world knew that almost 1,000 pieces of nuclear war heads were stationed in South Korea to destroy North Korea. The military forces on both sides were always on the alert and any accidental error would have disastrous effects on the peaceful celebration of the Games. It was, however, his knowledge that the Olympic Charter did not admit for a joint holding of the Games. In the present atmosphere, there would be wide-spread violence and unrest in South Korea. So far the student and labour demonstrators had not spoken against the holding of the Olympic Games in Seoul but if the IOC remained complacent on these issues, it would make the common man aware of the issue which would then take it to the streets. There were still three years to go, but ominously declared that the course of events would definitely take a violent turn in case the situation was not diffused. The IOC should take the bull by the horns and take such measures as to ensure peace and harmony by holding common unified Games under joint auspices of the two Koreas and thereby defeat the US conspiracy.

I answered the Vice President very briefly and informed him that the IOC was conscious of its responsibilities as had been demonstrated in 1976, 1980 and 1984, and it faces difficult situations fearlessly because its objectives were peace and friendship.

At no stage did I inform Mr. Kim of the parameters for discussion which had been laid down by the President.

On 19th and 20th July, I spent quite a lot of time persuading Mr. Kim to develop a more open attitude towards participation in the Games and not to treat rigidly what had been laid down in the Party manifesto. It was my recommendation to him that like the nine rounds of talks on the Red Cross etc. on the participation question, contact should not be broken off in any hasty manner. All the pros and cons should be patiently studied and action taken accordingly. His consistent reply was that the proposals of the Party had been forwarded already and that if there was any reaction to them it could be conveyed to him and only then could he further study the question in depth.

My impression after these talks for four days with the NOC as well as with the Vice President of the Country and Party was that North Korea now felt that if they

boycotted the Games they would perhaps earn the odium of the whole world and the best way to prove the other side wrong was to ask for a unified team in a manner which could appear attractive to the world opinion which was not well versed with contract and Charter provisions.

I returned to Lausanne on the morning of the 23rd.

## CONCLUSION

It is obvious from the above that North Korea's appreciation of the situation is that in view of the difficulties encountered by the IOC in 1976, 1980 and 1984, the IOC would not like to have another boycott with the attendant embarrassment in 1988 as that would impair the Olympic image and the Movement. It further appears that they have been under great pressure from other socialist blocs to be more positive in their reaction to participation in the Games and have apparently been baled [sic] out by Fidel Castro's advice that the Games should be organised from a joint Korean base. This would impress world opinion of North Korea's peaceful intentions and at the same time give a face-saving opportunity to this country to show to the world and the IOC that it abhors boycotts and would respond to participation if North Korea's stand that the two regions are a unified country is accepted, if not in the political sense, at least as far as the Olympic Games were concerned. In the event of this project not being accepted by the IOC, it would then be able to tell the world that they were really for participation but their just cause had been rejected for no fault of their own but purely on legalistic grounds.

The manner in which the Vice President of the Party has foreworded [sic] their case, appears to have a certain appeal for the man in the street as it highlights the anguish and pain of separated families in the long bitter forty years' rule of hostility which had made a firm imprint, and has been made worse by the US forces' presence in South Korea. Ideologically, the idea of a unified Korea appeals to the whole world and if North Korea now announces to the world that it would lower its guard to open its portals to those who love the Games, and also to the South Koreans in a spirit of peace and friendship it would be making a gallant gesture towards a smooth functioning of the Games. Their central point consists of a joint organisation of the Games.

A lay man is not really interested in understanding the technicalities and functioning of the Charter or, in strict terms, of a contractual obligation. I, therefore, feel that it is imperative that no matter what South Korea has to say on this point the IOC should emphasize its abhorrence of all fallouts, of political decisions which have been taken in the past and that the Olympic Movement was one for unifying Mankind through sports and peace. The IOC has to ensure now as it has done in the past, that it sticks to its word and to the contracts it has signed, and which were accepted by all IOC members including the member from North Korea. Despite this, the IOC would do all in its power to promote any expression which hightens [sic] symbolically unity of the two Koreas. As has been mentioned above, this could be demonstrated by consecutive marching in the Opening Ceremony, demonstrations of cultural activities etc.

Another suggestion which I have to make in this context is that since the torch has to run through many countries it could very well run through North Korea and conclude its journey in Seoul. It could cross the cease-fire line in as many places as possible to effectively exhibit to the world that during the Olympic Games peace prevails. This suggestion is worth serious consideration. However, I feel strongly that the above gestures from the IOC regarding the torch relay, the running of a marathon and cycling etc. or even one or two preliminary rounds in Archery or Table Tennis where not much revenue is to be collected should be conceded in order to give North Korea a face-saving device. If South Korea is in an accommodating mood as it is bound to

be, the further rounds of meetings to be held on subjects like the Red Cross, parliamentary unity and the strengthening of economic bonds will bring the two Korea together. Also, on the sports field, this symbolic exhibition of unity could even be broadened a little as to include one or two preliminary rounds of some minor games in North Korea.

This is the view also of the USSR and Chinese sports leaders and would completely isolate North Korea if it later on walks out on the Games. It would ensure the total participation of the remaining socialist bloc.

I have, however, no doubt in my mind that the manner in which the two sides are poised at the moment it gives them very little room for maneuvering for "instant" agreements which could today ensure the peaceful celebration of the Games in 1988. We should, therefore, be in no hurry to force both sides to come to an immediate decision on peaceful participation. Talks are going on other subjects where there are differences between the two countries and if they come to a decision on those subjects I have no doubt that they will come to a fruitful decision on the sports front also. Therefore, time is on our side and we should wait at least to ensure that the remaining socialist bloc countries take all steps that would ensure their participation and thereby pressurize North Korea to ultimately [sic] fall in line with them.

North Korea has already announced its proposal regarding the 1988 Games and according to this manifesto they would be satisfied with nothing short of a joint organisation, with evenly shared events, and the renaming of the Games, under a common sponsorship. Of course, the end product would be a united Korean team participation in the Olympic Games.

It need hardly be commented upon that the conditions set forth in this manifesto are repugnant to the Charter and our contract with the Seoul authorities. The only way in which North Korea could be given a face-saving device is to agree to symbolic unity. These concessions, however, should be kept in cold storage for the moment, and the dialogue which is to start in September between the two Koreas under our aegis should continue to inch forward until we can ultimately fabricate an improvised umbrella under which both Koreas can function happily by celebrating the 1988 Games. In the September meeting both parties should be heard out and North Korea should be firmly asked to lay on the table practical measures which they could suggest to implement what they have mentioned in their manifesto, without transgressing, in any manner, the provisions of the Olympic Charter or the contract with Seoul City or agreements with the International Federations. I feel that in this context, North Korea will ask for more time for consideration and this could be given to them. In the meantime, pressure is bound to build within the socialist bloc to force North Korea to agree to such symbols as marching consecutively, culture, torch relay, marathon etc. The world would also be impressed at our agreeing to the competitors crossing freely the cease-fire line of North Korea and South Korea should be requested to ensure security without asking the help of other powers to provide them with this cover.