



**Speech**  
**by**  
**the President of Iceland**  
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Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Friends.

Seven years ago, when I first attended an opening of the Special Olympics World Games, I witnessed the unique demonstration of humanity, passion, hope and the profound understanding which inspires the vision of our movement.

Thousands of athletes from all corners of the world flocked into the stadium while their families and friends, brothers and sisters, volunteers and other well-wishers cheered and applauded.

For many, perhaps all, it was a celebration of triumph, a victory over the struggle associated with intellectual disabilities, over the pain and the desperation that the athletes and their loved ones had previously endured.

For decades, our societies neglected the needs of the intellectually disabled, and unfortunately most of them still do. They were hidden away, kept in asylums, marginalized; the Almighty's forgotten children — and then Special Olympics began to transform our perspective, to campaign for another vision, succeeding in displaying the incredible, marvellous, inspiring capabilities of the intellectually disabled, kindling hope in the hearts of the athletes, their families and their friends.

Special Olympics is a pathway to inclusion, dispels myths and negative thinking, transforms societies as well as nations; it is a powerful catalyst for social change and global cooperation.

In China, thousands of athletes from all continents and nearly all countries will celebrate the joy of achievement. The Shanghai Games will be the world's largest sporting event of the coming year and also the first grand global games in the world of sport ever to be held in China.

The excellence of the preparations, the dedication of our Chinese hosts are a powerful signal of how China welcomes the future with a positive vision, determined to work together with others to transform the world in an inspiring way, giving the most neglected of our brothers and sisters a new chance to be included.

President Hu Jintao has given China the ambition to become a truly harmonious society and by inviting the World Games to his country he has brought to that vision additional strength.

We will witness not just a marvellous, unique sporting event, but also a powerful demonstration of how the world can be changed, how progress can be achieved despite the conflicts and crises that dominate the daily news.

Together with the global Special Olympics movement, our Chinese hosts will show the world the way to go forward, how to bring passion to the challenges which the unfortunate have to face far too often.

The humanity on display in Shanghai will be a profound proof of what can indeed be done, of the vision that inspires this building, of the ideals on which the United Nations were founded.

Not only at the Games, but every day, Special Olympics sends a message to everyone who is willing to listen: come – join the change; come – to create a world of acceptance and inclusion; come – to enrich your life while lending a helping hand to others.

Together, we dream of a world where prejudice and pity, indifference and fear have given way to genuine understanding, grateful appreciation and caring.

It has been a great privilege for me to join Special Olympics and the experience has had a profound impact on my Presidency and my thinking, on my vision of how to achieve a united and harmonious world.

I am proud to be with you today and look forward eagerly to witnessing the celebration of humanity which will be on display in China.