

Opening Address

Hans Günther Merk, Chairman of the National Organising Committee

The National Organising Committee for the 54th Session of the International Statistical Institute in Berlin in 2003 is abbreviated to NOC. These three letters are identical to the abbreviated form of the National Olympic Committee. This is why in some speeches I made in order to promote the 54th ISI Session, I confused the National Organising Committee with the National Olympic Committee. The reaction of the audience was laughter, both pleasant and mocking, which slightly confused me at first.

Having realized my mistake, on second thought I became aware that Olympic games and ISI Sessions really are quite similar, or at least comparable, in some respects.

As you know, the French Baron Pierre de Coubertin revived the ancient Olympics in 1894, and organised the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896.

The International Statistical Institute was founded in 1885. Under its first President, Sir Rawson W. Rawson, an English nobleman, the first ISI Session took place in Rome in 1887. The ISI was in the lead back then.

Since the date quoted above, the Olympic Games have been carried out at four-year intervals. ISI Sessions take place every two years, which is twice as often.

Athletes participating in the Olympic Games have been coming from all countries of the world. The same applies to ISI Session participants. Thus, participants from more than a hundred different countries have registered to attend the 54th ISI Session.

As to the sheer number of participants, however, the Olympics are clearly in the lead. At least the number of participants at ISI Sessions has risen over the past few decades from a few hundreds initially to more than 2000 – 2400, to be precise – at the 54th ISI Session.

Even the symbol of the Olympics, the five rings, might as well stand for the five Sections of the ISI, which, just as the Olympic Games, embrace all kinds of sports, and cover many areas of statistics.

In the face of all these facts, the following conclusion is perfectly justified:

The Sessions of the International Statistical Institute have assumed Olympic dimensions.

That this should be so, rightly is a matter of pride for the ISI, its members and the entire profession of statistics, who by the enormous work done in preparation for each Session, their scientific contributions and, last but not least, by their worldwide participation, make possible this long series of ISI Sessions.

As shown by the presence of high-rank representatives of the host countries at the opening ceremonies of previous ISI Sessions, for instance, in Seoul, Helsinki, Istanbul and Beijing, the importance of ISI Sessions for politics, economics and science has gained recognition.

Thus, it is a great honour and a great pleasure for me to welcome in our midst the President of our host country, the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr Johannes Rau.

Dear Mister President, I am sure to speak for all those here present in expressing my sincere thanks to you for taking part in this event, and for having agreed to address us after my welcoming speech. We see in your presence an enhancement of the prestige of this Session, and of statistics at large.

I add to this my thanks to the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, who by inviting the ISI to hold this Session in Berlin and by its willingness to guarantee the budget of the Session has laid the foundations for this event in Berlin. Therefore, it is a pleasure for me to welcome

state secretary Ute Vogt and other members of staff at the Federal Ministry of the Interior, who have appeared on behalf of the Federal Minister of the Interior, Mr Otto Schily.

The NOC chairman welcomes other federal ministers and state secretaries attending the opening ceremony, as well as those members of the Honorary Committee who are present.

I particularly welcome my successor in office at the Federal Statistical Office, President Johann Hahlen, with whose consent I have taken on the function of President of the National Organising Committee for this Session, and who has made available the funds for the Session in his budget. He and his staff deserve our thanks for their professional advice and their generous support in providing personnel for the organisation and running of the Session.

I now return to the smaller circle of the International Statistical Institute, whom I would first like to thank for entrusting the statisticians in Germany with the task of organising the 54th ISI Session in Berlin in 2003.

On this occasion I remember with gratitude the former Director of the ISI Permanent Office, the late Zoltan Kenessey (he died in 1998), who suggested very early that the 54th ISI Session should return to Germany exactly a hundred years after the 9th ISI Session had been held in this country for the first time in 1903.

Right from the start, beginning at the 50th ISI Session in Beijing, and up to the present day, the co-operation of the National Organising Committee with the ISI, its President and its Vice-President as well as with its Permanent Office has been completely harmonious. The ISI has given us every support we desired in the form of countless pieces of practical and professional advice.

Standing for all our friends at the ISI, I would like to welcome by name those representatives gathered on the podium.

I welcome

- the President of the ISI, Mr Dennis Trewin,
- the President Elect of the ISI, Mr Stephen Stigler,
- the three Vice-Presidents of the ISI,
 - Ms Denise Lievesley,
 - Mr Jae Chang Lee,
 - Mr Jef Teugels,
- the Director of the ISI Permanent Office, Mr Marcel van den Broecke,
- the Chair of the ISI Programme and Programme Coordinating Committees, Mrs Susan Linacre,
- the Chair of the Local Programme Committee, Mr Peter Wilrich,
- the Executive Secretary of the National Organising Committee, Mr Bernd Störtzbach.

Although he no longer sits on the podium, I nevertheless would also like to welcome by name the man who held the office of ISI President from 1999 to 2001, Mr Jean-Louis Bodin. Important decisions concerning the 54th ISI Session were made during his period of office and he also helped us with his advice and his experience on several occasions thereafter.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in my welcoming speech I also want to address the group of people who carry the main burden of preparing and running this Session. It consists of the members of the National Organising Committee and, above all, the members of the Executive Committee and its sub-committees.

In addition to the already mentioned Peter Wilrich and Bernd Störtzbach, I welcome and introduce:

- the Chair of the Budgetary Planning and Control Committee, Mr Günter Kopsch,
- the Chair of the Social Programme Committee, Mr Eckart Elsner,

- the Chair of the Public Relations Committee, Mrs Sibylle von Oppeln-Bronikowski,
- the Chair of the Information Technology Committee, Mr Dieter Sarreither,
- the Chair of the Sponsoring and Exhibition Committee, Mr Albert Benker,
- the Chair of the Protocol Committee, Mrs Rosemarie Mank.

In spite of the proverbial warning that one shouldn't count ones chickens before they are hatched, I dare predict that thanks to the splendid job made by the aforementioned group of persons we have good prospects of enjoying a Session of a high professional standard and 2nd will enjoy days of interesting experiences.

To conclude my welcome address, last but not least, I turn again to you all, the Session participants gathered in this festival hall.

I have just talked about the beneficial role of the ISI institutions, who have created a positive setting for the Session on the national and international levels.

To fill this setting with life, thus assuring the success of the Session, is in the hands of the participants. The success of the Session depends on the quality of the scientific contributions, of which there will be more than a thousand written and oral, on the discussions you will have with your colleagues during the Session, on your exchanges of professional experience and, not least, on the friendly atmosphere you will create on all occasions and, especially, at the social events, in your immediate surroundings.

With this in mind, I wish to you and to all of us a Session rich in new ideas and experiences.

I hereby declare the 54th Session of the International Statistical Institute in Berlin, 2003, open.

I thank you for your attention.