

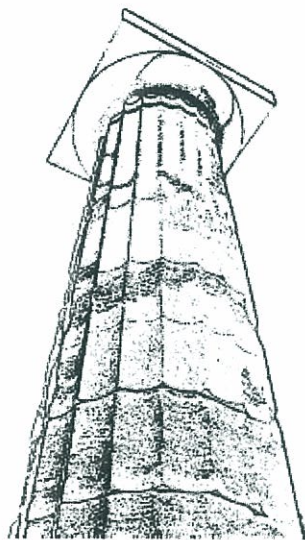
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*“Ekecheiria as ‘educational idea’
to develop a culture of peace”*

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EKECHEIRIA AS "EDUCATIONAL IDEA" TO DEVELOP A CULTURE OF PEACE

1. Ekecheiria: a transversal framework

*Ekecheiria*¹ is the Greek word that gave birth to what we know as the 'Olympic Truce', a concept sometimes also called the 'Sacred Truce', 'Truce of God'² or 'Truce of Classical Sport'.

Mythology tells us that the kings Lycurgus³, Kleosthenes and Iphitos entered into an agreement in 884 BC, at the suggestion of Iphitos after he consulted the Oracle at Delphi, representing their respective states of Sparta, Pisa and Elis.

This agreement⁴, known as the 'Olympic Games Pact', aimed to establish the terms below, to remain in force for the period of the truce:

- a) the suspension of hostilities, of all ongoing wars between the Greek city-states,
- b) the suspension of the implementation of the death penalty,
- c) the suspension of litigation to settle disputes.

Elis⁵ made a solemn pledge to remain neutral in all disputes that might arise between the various kingdoms, and this neutrality was accepted by the other states. The Hellenic dignitaries who organised the ceremonies would send out *spondophoroi* – emissaries, ambassadors, heralds or official messengers who were religious officials employed by priests to announce the date of the start of the OG throughout the land and proclaim the Olympic Truce⁶. That announcement meant that when the armies of the various kingdoms had to cross Elis to reach Olympia they laid down their weapons and crossed the territory unarmed. Only later, when they left the territory could they retrieve them. Therefore, under the public immunity or territorial immunity of Elis and subsequently the territory of Olympia, the soldiers who weeks earlier were fighting to the death, met together under the commitment of the truce to

¹ Literally this means holding and controlling one's hands.

² This is the term used in the Middle Ages to denote a temporary suspension of hostilities.

³ Legendary law-giver and statesman.

⁴ This agreement was kept in the temple sacred to Hera in the sacred grove of Altis, which confirms its importance.

⁵ Elis, the city where the Games were held, had the advantages that it was not a priority military target and was of little political and economic significance

⁶ They wore olive wreaths and along special personnel - the *theoroi* (representatives from each city-state) who were chosen by notables from the city to protect them from soldiers and any travellers of a dubious character that they might meet along the way. The announcement was made with trumpets. Duly protected, they travelled to all points of the compass, through all the city-states so as to solemnly proclaim the date of the Games (which coincided with the second or third full moon after the summer solstice) and invite all Greek-speaking citizens to take part in them. The pilgrims who were afraid to travel long distances in times of war were reminded of the terms of the Truce. In each city-state there were *proxenoi*, official agents equivalent to today's consuls, who handled the legal, diplomatic and financial affairs of pilgrims, and *therodokoi*, who welcomed the foreign dignitaries with due honour. After the 8th century BC, when the OG were extended to all Greek cities, the number of *spondophoroi* was increased to three, from the original one. This number remained unchanged, with the task of announcing the start date of the OG and proclaiming the sacred truce originating from the will of the god of Olympus being shared out. One went north, crossing mainland Greece as far as the Propontide rivers and the Black Sea; another headed for the islands and then went south-west to Asia, Syria and Egypt; the third took the western route to Sicily, Italy, Gaul, the Pyrenees and Marseille.



compete in compliance with the rules and socialised with one another in a spirit of healthy physical and mental rivalry⁷.

Though its origins are rooted in mythology, the Olympic Truce cannot be traced back to a legend, indeed, it is based on fact. This was borne out by the so-called 'Iphitos' disc⁸ – possibly the first official act relating to the history of the Olympic sanctuary, which bore an archaic concentric circular inscription of the rules of a 'sacred truce' between peoples, as follows: '*Olympia is a sacred place; whoever dares to tread this ground with their army will be condemned as a heretic. Equally wicked is the person who does not avenge a crime when he is able to do so*'⁹.

1.2. Goal

The purpose of the Olympic Truce was not to bring conflicts to an end, removing their causes and ensuring a lasting peace. Indeed, the goal was far less ambitious and more pragmatic: to enable the free movement of people taking part and interested in the OG, hold in Olympia¹⁰, in safety, *asphaleia*.

In fact it was intended to ensure that the OG, which would only take place on the assumption that the athletes first had to get to Olympia, could be held in the right conditions. In other words, the basic aim of the Olympic Truce was to ensure that the OG would run their course freely and that everyone who came to the sanctuary from every corner of Greece (mainland and colonies) would be safe. It was to make sure that war did not affect the normal course of the OG and that it would not be a cause or basis that prevented them from being held on the date fixed, or lead to them being interrupted.

The Truce was thus an excuse for and guarantee of the safe movement of the athletes. Thanks to this agreement, both the athletes and the pilgrims who wanted either to attend the Olympic Games (OG) held in Olympia, or to bring offerings to Zeus on this occasion, had their lives made easier. Indeed, the Truce forbade anyone from stopping an athlete or spectator on their journey to and from the OG, even if they were travelling through enemy or hostile territory. Basically, anyone who was heading to and from Olympia enjoyed freedom of movement and immunity¹¹.

⁷ We cannot categorically state that it was the truce that led to an ideology of peace developing among the Greeks. At any rate, orators such as Gorgias, Lysias, and Isocrates made speeches in Olympia for peace and after the Persian Wars between 476 and 472 they set up an international court where the cities could settle their differences.

⁸ It is a votive disc of gold and ivory, according to some, or of iron, according to others.

⁹ 'The Olympic truce is written on a disc', as the indefatigable traveller of antiquity Pausanias wrote in the 2nd century BC (V.20.1). Aristotle (4th century BC) and Plutarch (2nd century BC) also said they had seen the disc.

¹⁰ The agreement was signed 108 years before the first historic Olympiad, which corroborates the idea that there had been many Olympic festivals prior to the OG as such.

¹¹ The goal of the free and safe movement of people who wanted to participate in the OG either simply watching them or taking the chance for business and social and political alliances went hand-in-hand with the supreme significance of the games: as many as possible had to be present in a peaceful meeting, in the sacred place, and it was imperative to halt political and military conflicts and cease hostilities and atrocities that could ruin the event. It therefore became essential to set internal



Furthermore: the OG provided the context in which, in an oasis of calm, 40,000 people could fill the stadium, a rare and auspicious occasion for establishing diplomatic negotiations, discussing alliances and treaties in an unrivalled opportunity for social and intellectual interaction.

One thing is sure: the Olympics of Antiquity were devised with peace in mind, as the only way for the states to legally discontinue a permanent state of conflict. OG and Truce, then, were inseparable: one was not possible without the other. So Peace worked as a precondition, a *sine qua non* for the staging of the OG. During a holy period - *hieromenia* – the *pax olimpica* became the cornerstone of the Olympic festival, making war seem like something trivial, mundane, secondary, at least in the 'eyes' of the gods¹².

1.3. Duration

It is undisputed that the period of peace – *eirene* – covered by the Olympic Truce was in fact restricted; it was not final or permanent - the period of time in question varied. The sources differ as to how long the Truce lasted, ranging from one month to three months. The majority view tends towards a period of one month, in principle. Later on, after the 5th century BC when athletes and spectators started coming from places further afield, the period was three months, counting from the day the *spondophoroi* set off¹³ and covering the holy month of the OG, the preceding month and the month that followed. But others say that the truce lasted 5 or even 10 months, because there had to be time to inform everyone.

1.4. Significance and effects

We must restore the Olympic Truce to its true proportions.

It was not intended to end the war between Greeks and barbarians, not least because the Greeks were intrinsically lovers of war, which consumed them: they were born warriors and war was the natural state of their people, and they did not lack it. We only have to think of the myth of the wedding of Aphrodite and Ares, the gods of love and war, celebrated on the assumption that 'Harmony' could arise from love and conflict, to the point that this was the name given to the daughter they bore.

Furthermore: this was a time when wars were the means that came most easily to hand to settle border disputes between neighbouring cities as well as the most serious issues between states.

differences to one side and render them insignificant – they were actually ignored – in light of the supreme value of the OG which always operated in a disciplined manner.

¹² And thus we have the Olympic Truce, the ultimate expression of the political transcendence of the Panhellenic Games in general, and the OG in particular: tribute was thus paid to the OG that defused political strife and military confrontations.

¹³ The Truce naturally started on different dates from city to city, depending on when the *spondophoroi* arrived.



Strictly speaking, the Olympic Truce is not an armistice¹⁴, and it is certainly not permanent. It did not set out to be a permanent peace but peace in its most minimalist version: cessation of war in determined places and for certain periods of time. The Olympic Truce presumes the agreed discontinuation or suspension of war, i.e. it does not involve the agreement to definitively put an end to a dispute - in fact various conflicts ran their course during the OG¹⁵.

At any rate, the significance and effects of the Olympic Truce in Antiquity are remarkable. Let us look at them.

Athletes in the Olympic Games represented and honoured the city-state they came from, and so a personal victory meant a victory for their city-state. The Olympic Truce thus operated as symbolic way of replacing conflicts between city-states with noble competition between their athletes, thereby lending a political and educational character to the Panhellenic world.

Furthermore: the Olympic Truce was undeniably an important instrument of unity of the Greeks, helping to unify the Greek states and colonies: the agreement helped to forge a national unity. The finest young Greeks who came together in a peaceful competition were admired by the crowd and this instilled a spirit of national unity. Such national unity was not achieved at the level of territory, however, since this continued to be divided and exist in a warlike climate, but through a community of culture and values, via the OG, which even assumed a spiritual dimension of message and experience of a peaceful reconciliation¹⁶.

1.5. Sanctions for violation

The Truce assumed that endorsement was voluntary, that is, it was based on the rationale that sport does not impose peace but that it can inspire it (it did not promise peace but offered hope and inspiration). There was no guarantee that it would be respected, but in practice, given the severe punishments for breaching it and the ruthless way they were applied¹⁷, it had considerable coercive force.

This explains why the Truce was only rarely broken in the 12 centuries of the Olympics in Antiquity (776 BC – 393 AD). Here, too, the sources do not fully agree, but with two or five

¹⁴ Etymologically, armistice means 'stopping weapons'. It is true that the Olympic truce presumed this, but the concept of armistice, contrary to that of truce, does not assume a simple interval between two wars, an interval whose limits are known from the start. An armistice, even though it places the belligerents in a temporary, insecure situation, is renewed if necessary until a peace treaty that is intended to endure is signed.

¹⁵ Subject to proper proportions, we can trace a parallel with the fact that the celebration of religious festivals in Greek cities would require a temporary halt to public activities, including court sessions (a kind of 'judicial vacation').

¹⁶ The Olympic Truce functioned as a way of putting into practice the rings of peace, friendship, social interaction of peoples and all the *polis*, without aggression, violence or any kind of tension: everyone mingled together, friends and enemies, without fear of violence in a form of human being inspired by the gods and in honour of them, their families and the land, being freed from their more violent instincts. Moreover, the Olympic Truce, proved to be an educational means of showing how disputes can be settled through dialogue, respect and democratic awareness.

¹⁷ It was in front of the temple of Zeus, where there was a large statue of Truce crowning Iphitos, that those who had had the audacity to fail to respect the Olympic Truce were judged.



instances of breach, it can always be said that they were a rarity¹⁸, even if some specious interpretations have viewed these breaches as a sign of decadence of the OG.

The Olympic Truce had an ethical, moral and religious significance, which lent it a powerful binding force and meant that any breach was regarded as sacrilege. The Olympic Truce was thus seen as a divine command and was surrounded with an aura of 'glory' and a divine curse is even said to have existed for anyone who dared to break the peace of Zeus¹⁹.

The sources also indicate that until the guilty city paid the penalty it could not consult the Oracle at Delphi. Furthermore, the offender was sentenced to serve in the Temple of Zeus. There is no confirmation of what some have ventured regarding a religious penalty of death or slavery for breaking the Olympic Truce.

2. Ekecheiria as 'educational idea' to develop a culture of peace

If we can have peace for sixteen days, then maybe, just maybe, we can have it forever²⁰

The global reach of the Games means the Truce's message can be transmitted to more than half the world's population every two years, and the grassroots presence of sporting networks and practices across the world brings to life the role that sport can play in building cohesive communities on a daily basis²¹

This overview of *ekecheiria* allows us to say that for the Greeks the Olympic Truce worked in terms of participation in the OG, inasmuch as it was a sort of negative peace²² in the sense of a temporary absence of violence or war. It had this virtue, albeit restricted in time and space, of demonstrating that if mankind so wished, moved by sport and/or religion, it was possible for enemies to cease hostilities and make peace and enable the accomplishment of a sporting competition, a business deal or a political-diplomatic pact. This example both can and must continue today, in the quest for a culture of peace. And for this purpose it is certainly important to bridge the gap of *ekecheiria* with the Olympic Truce in the Modern Era, which can be achieved by keeping the project and ideal of Pierre de Coubertin alive.

¹⁸ The chronicles tell us that, during the Peloponnesian War (420 BC) – when reconciliation for peace was a popular theme in Olympic orations – Sparta was sentenced to a severe penalty of 2000 *minas* for having attacked Lepreum, a city in Elis, by means of the 'Olympic law' (*olympiakos nomos*). The Spartans refused to pay and were excluded from the games for several years. Later (348 BC) an Athenian athlete, a mercenary called Phrynon was captured by the Macedonians when he was getting ready to take part in the OG – and so the soldier guarding the king of Macedonia, Philip II, father of Alexander the Great, had to pay a deposit to be released, even though the king had said in that regard that his troops were ignoring the fact that the Truce had started, he apologised and paid the penalty. There is also mention of breaches in 748 BC (war between Elis and Pisa); 388 BC; 364 BC (Pisa invaded Olympia); 476 BC (the Persians broke the Olympic Truce), and 1 AD, in the Roman era.

¹⁹ According to the wise men and poets of antiquity he was the administrator of peace and war.

²⁰ George A. Papandreou, Vice-Chairman of the International Olympic Truce Foundation and the International Olympic Truce Centre.

²¹ Rachel BRIGGS, Helen McCARTHY and Alexis ZORBAS, *16 Days: The role of the Olympic Truce in the toolkit for peace ...*, p. 48.

²² Negative peace, in the sense of a temporary absence of violence or war – peace as an absence of war makes its definition dependent on what repudiates it.



It is worthwhile keeping this in mind: with the revival of the OG, Pierre de Coubertin gave a broader and more ambitious meaning to the Olympic Truce, retaining its moulds but making them permanent, not confined to the Olympic Games but linking them to something more global and immaterial: Olympism. The new garments of the Olympic Truce steer us to an OG²³ as an instrument to enforce peace as a universal value, no longer restricted in space and time, but in a structured way, day after day of each Olympiad, as part of a broad project for the education of humankind, the athletes and the different nations, a peace which is sown to be nurtured. Here, a kind of positive peace is endorsed, one where education for peace blossoms through the Olympic Movement and the OG where there is a constant demand for peace as a permanent state of peaceful resolutions.

Unlike *ekecheiria*, the modern Olympic Truce²⁴ of today is a sort of positive peace, where education for peace is nurtured through the Olympic Movement and where there is a sustained search for peaceful settlements in which there is a dream of a permanent state of peace. It can be said that today the Olympic Truce has become an expression of the aspiration of everyone to build a better world, one that is based on values that include **understanding, tolerance, mutual trust, (multicultural) dialogue, cooperation, diplomacy 'by other means', peaceful coexistence between individuals and peoples, public spiritedness, reconciliation, honesty, humanism, healthy and fair competition, solidarity and justice.**

One of the great virtues of the Olympic Truce acclaimed by today's society, but which now seeks inspiration in Classical Antiquity, is precisely the ability to show more or less symbolically²⁵, that if states are willing and motivated there are enough opportunities and ways to mutually cooperate and settle conflicts without having to go through war. The solution lies in peaceful dialogue and the search for lasting solutions to restore peace in all areas suffering conflict.

²³ It was in 1952, on the 1st of July, that the Olympic Truce was first proclaimed in headquarters of the OG of the Modern Era. In the official report of the Organising Committee of the Helsinki Olympic Games there is one page called *Ekecheiria*. Four years later, when seven countries boycotted the 1957 Melbourne Olympics this led to the members of the IOC adopting a position by calling for the 'updating' of the Olympic Truce: 'The 53rd Session of the International Olympic Committee at its first meeting in Melbourne, November, 1956, points out that for almost 1200 years EKECHEIRIA (World Peace) was proclaimed during the Olympic Games in Ancient Greece. The promotion of this ideal is still one of our objectives, and the IOC on behalf of the tens of millions of supporters of the Olympic Movement throughout its 89 member countries, wishes to draw world attention to this fact, and also to the friendly atmosphere of good will which prevails among athletes, officials and spectators from more than three score different nations, some of which do not even maintain diplomatic connections, who are observing the amateur sport rules of fair play here in Australia during the Games of the XVI Olympiad' – in The International Olympic Committee: One Hundred Years ..., p. 176.

²⁴ In the OG in the modern era the Olympic Truce comes into force on the seventh day before the event and ends on the seventh day after it.

²⁵ The symbolism brings us to the message that the Olympic Truce conveys and to its own symbol, too, which is a dove of peace, representing one of the ideals and challenges of the IOC - to build a peaceful and better world through sport. Behind the dove we can see the Olympic flame (composed of colourful effervescent elements), which brings all peoples the warmth of friendship through sharing and camaraderie, celebrating the human spirit. They are elements that symbolise the closeness between peoples, regardless of race, through respect for the Olympic Truce.



Mutatis mutandis, this reasoning works for relations between citizens. And here let me cite some words that I believe are very useful:

We want to point out that, unlike the traditional conception so often set out, the culture of peace is not a distant utopian model but a philosophy of life that entails an ethical commitment to humanising society starting from everyday social contexts: family, friends, work, community, etc. In other words, peace is not limited to national and international relations; it covers all areas of life, including the personal and interpersonal, and is therefore the responsibility of each and every one of us. The culture of peace is thus a continuous and accessible process where cooperation, understanding and trust at every level lay the foundations of interpersonal and intergroup relations and also people's interrelational relationships with the natural environment in which they develop.

*The educational response to the philosophical conceptions of the culture of peace is what is being called **education for peace**. This can be defined as the continuous or permanent process of making individuals and society aware that a new type of culture is tending to develop, the culture of peace, characterised by a triple harmony of human beings with themselves, with others and with the environment in which it they develop²⁶. (Emphasis added)*

So this is a quotation about a reality²⁷.

It is therefore vital to make human beings aware of the virtues of the Olympic Truce and encourage them to move away from a culture of war and draw nearer to the philosophy of life that is intrinsic to Olympism, which is based on an ethical commitment, and a humanised and peaceful society. People inculcated with this philosophy and educated for this context will have a different attitude, to be better both in their more 'macro' role, that is, in the area of international relations, and at the more 'micro', but equally important, level of their day-to-day social contexts: their social posture with family, friends, workplace – all the different communities to which they belong (including as players or spectators of sports), that is, in all the different areas of their life, personal and interpersonal, which are the responsibility of each and every one of us.

Since education in the Olympic values associated with the Truce - from the *ekecheiria* to the Olympic Truce in the Modern Era – is not a neutral process it could be useful to clarify not only the values it upholds but those it condemns, too. In other words, it is not enough to advocate

²⁶ AAVV, *Juegos y actividades para la incorporación de valores en la Educación Física ...*, pp. 37-38.

²⁷ Coubertin saw human beings as active subjects who are greatly influenced by their surroundings, starting with their own bodies and including the historical context in which they find themselves. Sport is a vehicle for communication, understanding and peacefulness among peoples. The contact between athletes from different nations is a warranty of mutual knowledge (as opposed to ignorance) and cohabitation, mutual assistance, uniting. We can thus say that Coubertin saw physical education and sport establish and provide a constant intercultural lesson in pacifism.



the values stated and emphasised above, and the spotlight should fall strongly on any active opposition to some very current negative issues, inside and outside sport, which revolve around violence in the broad sense of the word. This means war, domestic violence, bullying, racism, xenophobia, sexual harassment, homophobia, discrimination on the grounds of disability or lack of resources, and any other forms of social discrimination.

Within their respective powers and competences, but often together, different entities have fruitfully disseminated the Olympic Truce in a strong commitment to its educational value. A special mention should be made in this regard to the role of the International Olympic Committee, the International Olympic Academy, the United Nations²⁸, the International Olympic Truce Foundation, the International Olympic Truce Centre²⁹, and the Olympic Games Organising Committees³⁰. We would also like to praise the practical results seen in recent years, especially in years when the Olympic Games have been very heartening³¹ in the sense

²⁸ The relations between the IOC and the UN have been very close for decades. In the context of the Olympic Truce, it is emphasised that in 1993 the General Assembly of the UN adopted its first resolution calling for the observance of the Olympic Truce - Resolution 48/11 of 25 October 1993 – in which reference is made to knowing that the IOC intended to restore the ancient Greek tradition of the Olympic Truce for the sake of international understanding and the maintenance of peace. Right there, taking into account the spirit of brotherhood and understanding between peoples, the states were urged to take the initiative to individually and collectively observe the Truce and peacefully resolve all international conflicts, in accordance with the objectives and principles of the UN Charter – which in the year preceding the OG had adopted similar resolutions. These were those that received the most support or signatures in the history of the United Nations, as the voting figures show: 121, in 1993; 161 in 1995; 178 in 1997; 169 in 1999; 173 in 2001; 190 in 2003; 191 in 2005; 183 in 2007; 193 in 2011. It should also be noted that at the UN Millennium Summit (6-8 September 2000) which was attended by over 150 Heads of State and Government, the final Millennium Declaration that was adopted included a specific paragraph on respect for the Olympic Truce.

²⁹ This Centre has drawn up a wide-ranging educational programme with four main components: conferences; internet-based activities, forums and discussions; study trips; literature. The power of the media is also harnessed, and collaborations, affiliations and international contact networks are encouraged.

³⁰ The OG Organising Committees draft specific work programmes to spread the ideals of the Olympic Truce.

³¹ This is a chronological, but not comprehensive, list of some actions: (i) 1993: Recognising the Olympic Truce as a unique instrument that promotes global peace, the UN adopted landmark resolution in 1993 at the 48th session of the General Assembly, calling on all Member States to cease hostilities during the Olympic Games; (ii) 1994: On the occasion of the Olympic Games in Lillehammer, Norway, diplomatic efforts and the invocation of the Olympic Truce enabled an IOC delegation, headed by its President Juan Antonio Samaranch to visit Sarajevo, a city devastated by conflict that had staged the Winter Olympics ten months before. There was an appeal to permit the participation of athletes from the former Yugoslavia in the OG. That same year was proclaimed by the UN as the International Year of Sport and the Olympic Ideal; (iii) 1998: The Olympic Truce during the Nagano Winter Olympics in 1998 enabled the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, participate in a mediation mission to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis in Iraq; this culminated in the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the UN and the Government of Iraq; (iv) 2000: During the opening ceremony of the Sydney OG, delegations from South Korea and North Korea marched together under one banner of the Korean Peninsula. The International Olympic Truce Centre was created that year; (v) 2004: Afghanistan and Iraq, both in a state of conflict, participated in the OG, and the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan appeared on video at the opening ceremony and acknowledged the contribution of Olympism and the Olympic Truce. These OG instituted the custom of international personalities signing the wall of the Olympic Truce; (vi) 2006: On the occasion of the Winter Olympic Games in Turin, the first



that observance of the Olympic Truce in its modern conception is not just a Utopia, and can indeed foster peace and understanding between peoples.

All of us, in our countries and different activities, must be able to create contexts for spreading the Olympic Truce, for educating through the Olympic Truce. And obviously each of us must individually lead by example.

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time an OG Organising Committee developed a (broad) national program of activities and conferences on the theme of promoting peace through sport; (vii) 2011: The first meeting between the Olympic Committees of Israel and Palestine took place at the IOC headquarters to discuss topics related to sport, under the mediation of the President of the IOC, Jacques Rogge. Some successful diplomatic measures are also pointed out. By way of example, and on two opposite levels, East Timor participated in the Sydney 2000 OG with two athletes under the banner 'Independent Olympic Athletes', while Afghanistan was suspended in 1999 and could not participate in those OG because of the Taliban rule that it forbade women to participate in OG.



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