

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear members and friends of the FEI,  
Dear equestrian fans and members of the media,

Good morning, good afternoon, or good evening, wherever you are joining us from around the world, and a warm welcome to those here in Abu Dhabi for the FEI General Assembly 2024!

It's an absolute pleasure to be here in Abu Dhabi, a first-time for the FEI General Assembly, and what a wonderful backdrop for this important annual gathering! And to the delegates, Presidents and Secretary Generals who are joining us for the first time: Welcome!

We have had some engaging and productive discussions over the past few days and I hope you also had the possibility to enjoy yourselves and reconnect with friends.

Before I go further, allow me, on behalf of all of us, to extend our thanks to our hosts, the United Arab Emirates Equestrian and Racing Federation – in particular President General Al Raisi and Secretary General Dr Al Hajiri – for the warm and exceptional welcome and hospitality.

This is the fourth time that our General Assembly is organised in a hybrid format and I am happy to announce that we have 80 National Federations represented by delegates in-person, and 17 National Federations participating and voting online.

We have a number of representatives from Official Stakeholder Groups with whom we have signed Memorandums of Understanding attending this General Assembly, and of course members of the FEI staff led by our Secretary General, Sabrina Ibáñez.

It's a pleasure to welcome Daniel Alvarez, the FEI's new Director of Finance, who took over the position from Claude Praz earlier this year and we look forward to his first presentation on the finances of the FEI.

And I am pleased to have the support of the FEI Board here on stage, always ready to provide their invaluable counsel. Each member brings unique expertise and represents different interests and regions of the world. Since last year's General Assembly in Mexico City, the Board has held one in person meeting in June and another three days ago here in Abu Dhabi, along with seven teleconferences – all of which had long agendas and challenging decisions to make. I would like to thank the Board for their efficiency in dealing with all these important topics.

This year, the General Assembly is once again being live streamed for the public, allowing everyone to watch live and on replay.

All supporting documents as well as summaries from the meetings held this week, will be publicly available on the General Assembly's Hub, reflecting our commitment to good governance and transparency.

Looking back on 2024, I believe we can say we had an incredible year.

We had fantastic Olympic and Paralympic Games, filled with outstanding sporting moments against the stunning backdrop of the château of Versailles!

We are extremely grateful to France and the Paris 2024 Organising Committee for providing such an incredible venue, which allowed us to showcase our sport in an exceptional way. Given the large number of spectators, and the well-known equestrian and public personalities who were in attendance, we can confidently say that our sport was one of the standout highlights of Paris 2024.

One of my personal highlights was spending an afternoon with President Macron of France, who enthusiastically celebrated the French Jumping Team winning the bronze medal.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Organising Committee, the IOC, GL Events, together with our staff, the officials and the many volunteers for their contributions to the success of these Games. A special word of thanks to the staff of the Park of Versailles, who provided invaluable support throughout the entire journey.

I would like to take a moment to congratulate Catrin Norinder and her team who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure all the logistics ran smoothly. While the road was sometimes challenging and bumpy, we can be truly proud of the outcome.

But let us not forget to congratulate the medallists and together with them all participants because making it to the Games is already a great achievement. We saw outstanding performances and a high level of sportsmanship in Paris, and I also want to thank their entourage, the horse owners, grooms, coaches, National Federations and National Olympic Committees for all their support.

As you know, we have been reviewing the formats for the Olympic and Paralympic Games since the General Assembly in Tokyo in 2016. And I believe that, with the additional adjustments made after the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, that we now have a strong and successful format. And I was also happy to hear this in Paris from the Athletes. After so many years of hard work, it feels like I can finally take off my bullet proof jacket.

While we are still awaiting the IOC's evaluation, particularly concerning media, digital and broadcast, I am confident that the success of Paris will further consolidate our position in the Olympic Programme.

Despite the fact that we are still waiting for the decision of the IOC Executive Board regarding the quota, events and disciplines for Los Angeles 2028, we are

already working intensively with the LA28 Organising Committee. And in Paris we also had the opportunity to have discussions with the organisers of Brisbane 2032.

And although the IOC Executive Board's decision regarding the quota, events and disciplines for Los Angeles 2028 is still pending, this has not interfered with our forward-thinking approach. We are already working intensively with the LA Organising Committee, and have also already engaged in discussions with the Organisers of Brisbane 2032.

Another highlight of 2024 was the first edition of the Longines League of Nations™. This new concept that was established with the help of the Athletes, Chefs and National Federations has proven to be a fantastic success and holds great promise for the future! I would like to extend a special 'thanks' to our partner Longines and particularly to Mr Urs Schiendorfer, Longines Global Consultant for Equestrian sport who played a key role in the success of the revamped series.

In addition to the Olympic and Paralympic Games and Longines League of Nations™, we witnessed more events, including series and championships, more events than ever before. While there are too many to thank here, I would like to thank everybody for their contribution to the success and growth of our sport.

Regrettably, this year's successes have been overshadowed by multiple instances of horse welfare issues, including cases involving high-profile athletes. This scrutiny has placed our sport's community under the public microscope, exerting tremendous pressure on our veterinary and communications teams at FEI headquarters, who have faced an overwhelming number of enquiries from the media, equestrian fans, and the general public.

If there has ever been a crucial moment for us to earn the trust and respect of the public, it's now. Over the past months, we have worked to establish a framework that unites us all in this important effort. At the FEI Board meeting held before the General Assembly in Mexico City last year, the Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission (EEWB) presented their final report, outlining six priority areas and 30 recommendations for how the FEI should lead and act.

Based on the report's findings, the FEI Equine Welfare Strategy has been formulated with a clear vision to ensure a good life for FEI horses, complemented by our mission to be the guardians of horse welfare. To address the areas of focus and recommendations identified by the EEWB, the FEI has developed an Action Plan aimed at ensuring the welfare of FEI horses while inspiring and supporting welfare initiatives for all horses globally.

"Be a Guardian" is the central message that unites our community around the FEI Action Plan. The term 'guardian' marks an evolution in the FEI's narrative of the horse-human partnership, reflecting the human role in caring for horses and highlighting each individual's responsibility for ensuring horse welfare. This shift in terminology is not merely symbolic; it signifies a fundamental change in our approach to equine welfare.

Words hold weight only when backed by meaningful action. While we recognise that we may not please everyone, we believe the Action Plan provides a clear framework for making informed decisions. We need everyone's help, to raise awareness and take action at all levels, reinforcing our collective responsibility as 'guardians' of our horses.

A constructive dialogue among all stakeholders is essential for success. And I am hopeful that the recent Dressage Stakeholder meeting held in Lausanne on 1 October will pave the way for a brighter future, not just for the discipline but for the sport as a whole.

Not surprisingly, our workload continues to grow and every department at the FEI is now having to manage multiple projects on a daily basis. Improving and extending the services we provide to our community – like the digital horse passport for example – and especially to our athletes, requires financial resources. However, it is not just about the finances. For some years now, International Sport Federations have faced increasing demands from other organisations such as governments, sport umbrella organisations and the International Olympic Committee. Every year we are required to undertake new initiatives and create new procedures to meet these demands and to comply with these new requirements.

Some of these initiatives include safeguarding, anti-corruption and reporting mechanisms, sustainability efforts, and biosecurity measures. The implementation of the FEI Strategy and Action Plan will also demand substantial human resources and financial investments to ensure its successful execution.

And as the FEI is financially healthy, an internal evaluation of our operational revenues and costs reveals a structural deficit.

To continue providing and responding competently to all externally imposed requirements, we must increase our revenue. As explained yesterday, since 2005, we have introduced over 70 new services, tools and applications to serve our community better – ranging from performance records and Rankings, to Online Entry and Invitation Systems, and various mobile applications.

However, the yearly athlete registration fee has remained at CHF 10 since 2005, without any adjustment for inflation.

To maintain and expand our services, we will need to increase this fee, and while raising it to CHF 55, it will not fully bridge the gap. We wanted to set a reasonable rate for our National Federations and we also believe that from our side we need to make efforts to improve efficiency.

In order to apply a logical approach for the budget and financial charges for 2026, we will first ask approval for the amended financial charges as they will of course have an impact on the budget. If not approved we will have to review the budget and make the necessary cuts that will lead inevitable to cuts in the services.

## Opening speech FEI President Ingmar De Vos

So, I hope that you will support the proposed increase as leaving a financially robust FEI for my successor in 2026 is a significant part of my presidential legacy as well as continuing a high level of services to our community.

Speaking about legacy and about the presidential elections in 2026, I would like to bring to your attention that we have created an independent working group under the leadership of the Chair of the Audit and Compliance Committee to define the desired profile of the future FEI President. Currently, our governance structure does not adequately outline the role of the president.

And I believe it's important to engage in this exercise in *tempore non suspecto* and examine the role and job description of the Presidency in other International Olympic Federations. This will provide our National Federations with the opportunity to consider the profile and responsibilities of the future president.

And the working group will present their report during a session at next year's Sport Forum, where they will also facilitate a discussion between the National Federations. And while I do not wish to pre-empt the outcome, this process could lead to a more clearly defined profile and job description for the future president which will be presented for approval at our General Assembly in 2025.

This way when the application period opens in February 2026, potential candidates will have a clear understanding of the type of president our National Federations are seeking to lead the FEI

I could go on discussing all the projects we are working on, but we have a very busy day ahead of us.

So, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the National Federations, Regional and Continental Associations, and our Official stakeholders for their invaluable contributions and unwavering professionalism. A sincere 'thank you' to the Organisers of our Events, to our Athletes, Grooms, Officials, and dedicated sports personnel, the media, and our sponsors.

And last but certainly not least, after such a demanding year, and before we dive into the agenda, I wish to extend my thanks to all the volunteers, Committee Members, the FEI Board and the exceptional FEI Headquarters staff. Your passion, dedication and hard work have been instrumental to our progress.

And thank you Sabrina, for leading our organisation with such professionalism.

We are a strong, diverse community with a shared interest, and the decisions we make today will shape the future of our sport.

So, let's ensure that this General Assembly makes a difference. Let's focus on our collective responsibility and move forward in ways that serve the best interest of the sport and the FEI... your FEI!

## Opening speech FEI President Ingmar De Vos

Before we move on, I would like to take the opportunity to invite the UAE Equestrian and Racing Federation President HE Major General Dr. Ahmed Naser Al Raisi to address the General Assembly.

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Thank you for your inspiring speech and your incredible hospitality.

Let us now take a moment to remember the members of our equestrian family who we have lost since the General Assembly in 2023. These people, these individuals, these friends were an integral part of our community, and were dedicated to shaping our sport at the local, national, regional and international level.

May I now kindly ask you all to please stand in their honour.

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Thank you for your time and let's get to work now!

Sabrina, the floor is yours.