

FEI™ HYBRID GENERAL ASSEMBLY

MEXICO CITY 18-21 NOVEMBER 2023

FEI HYBRID GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2023 OPENING BY THE FEI PRESIDENT

Ladies and gentlemen, dear members and friends of the FEI, dear equestrian fans and members of the media,

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening - "Buenos dias", "Buenas tardes", o "Buenas noches" depending on where you might be in the world and welcome to the FEI Hybrid General Assembly 2023!

It's an absolute pleasure to be here in Mexico City, a first-time for the FEI General Assembly, and what has already proven to be a wonderful backdrop for this important annual meeting!

As expected, it's been a colourful few days already. The discussions have been fruitful, the debates insightful and the atmosphere absolutely amical!

So before I go any further, allow me, on all our behalf, to thank our hosts - the Mexican Equestrian Federation - and namely their President Juan Manuel Cossio - for the warm and exceptional hospitality they have generously extended to the global FEI Family.

For this third consecutive Hybrid General Assembly, with us in Mexico City we have 69 National Federations represented by delegates in-person and 34 National Federations registered to participate and vote online but we will be updated on this as the day goes by.

We also have a number of representatives from Official Stakeholder Groups with whom we have signed Memorandums of Understanding attending this GA, members of FEI staff with a special mention for our Secretary General, Sabrina Ibáñez, who leads the team day in and day out, and two new key hires this year whom some of you will have met on the road already.

Our new Director for Jumping, Todd Hinde from Australia who started in September, and Ronan Murphy from Ireland, our new Director for Dressage, Para Dressage, and Vaulting who joined us in July.

Needless to say, their onboarding has been swift and extremely intense, but I am sure also extremely insightful, with so much happening both on and off the field of play.

And of course, we have the FEI Board, who are here with me on stage, always ready to provide their invaluable council. Each with their very own areas of expertise and representative of different interests and regions of the world.

On that note, I would like to take this opportunity to excuse our Athletes' Committee Chair and Executive Board Member Jessica Kuersten, who could not be with us in-person in Mexico City but is following all the discussions very closely online.



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And also our Dressage Chair Maribel Alonso who had to leave our General Assembly unexpectedly for urgent family reasons.

We wish them both all the best.

As is customary, the General Assembly is being live streamed for the public, and is accessible for all to watch live and in replay on the General Assembly Hub, with all documents pertaining to this meeting, as well as wrap ups from all the meetings held so far this week also publicly available on the GA Hub which is in line with our commitment to good governance and transparency.

But before I delve into the General Assembly week, and the decisions we have ahead of us, I would like take a moment to share our concern and express the sadness we are all feeling in regards to the devastating and deadly conflicts around the world, such as the ongoing war in Ukraine and more recently the escalating situation in Israel and Palestine.

The loss of life and the destruction of livelihoods is absolutely heartbreaking, and as a community, a sport and an international governing body, it is important that we can support our global equestrian family and related horse populations in the most meaningful way we can.

In recent weeks, we have been in contact with the National Federations of Israel and Palestine, and we are developing a plan to provide support to the equestrian community in Palestine, as we have done for Ukraine, following severe damage to several equestrian infrastructures, as well as little or no access to veterinary supplies and facilities.

Where for Ukraine also the support from EEF and USEF is very much appreciated, for Palestine we are very happy to see a strong support and commitment from the National Federations of Group VII.

With the FEI Solidarity Emergency Relief Fund we were able to bring some respite to our colleagues and equestrian friends in Turkey and Syria earlier this year following a devastating earthquake, and in New Zealand following Cyclone Gabrielle.

These unpredictable and devastating situations are an unfortunate reminder of just how important it is to have FEI Solidarity Programmes and an Emergency Relief Fund in place, so that we can provide support to our members and our community in times of hardship, but also, so that we can be there when the time comes to rebuild.

It is our duty to keep the momentum going, and in spite or even in the name of all the hardship, we need to continue to plan for the future of our sport;

We need to remain focused on improving ourselves and what equestrian stands for; and we need to believe in the power of sport and the positive impact we can have on individual lives and communities.



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This is very much the Olympic message: one of hope, optimism, solidarity – and working together for a better world and a better sport.

And as simple as it sounds, this is why we are all here this week in Mexico City.

So what's happened so far?

At the FEI Board Meeting on the 18th of November, a number of important decisions were made with regards to Rules for series as well as appointments of Officials for the Paris 2024 Games and the allocation of major events, especially the FEI World Championships 2026 so congratulations to Aachen and Al Ula.

But we also decided to lift the protective measures for Russian and Belarussian athletes allowing them in future to compete as neutral individuals. But the conditions still need to be established as well as the timeline.

There were also discussions around strategic planning and positioning for the FEI; governance related protocols, among others, and the much-anticipated delivery of the Final report – A Good Life for Horses - by the Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission which you will hear more about today from their Chair Professor Natalie Warran.

Their vision for the future involvement of horses in sport is an important body of work, and I take this opportunity to thank the Commission for their commitment to the process.

The holistic scope of action they have outlined, which will contribute to a larger strategy and concrete measures the FEI will be presenting at the Sports Forum next year.

Science-backed research is vital when it comes to driving and implementing change in the equestrian landscape, or imposing new Rules and legislation around horse welfare.

So I wanted to briefly touch on some of the research the FEI is involved with or leading behind the scenes, in a bid to grow the knowledgebase and help make informed decisions for the future of the sport.

This is of course not the full list but here are some of the key projects I wanted to highlight and also emphasise our financial commitment:

- A study on the correlation between footing and forces in a horse's limb. This is being conducted by Professor Lars Roepstorff from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and is being funded 100% by the FEI.
- We are also working towards the development of a saliva-based method for in-competition testing with the objective to develop a non-invasive method to sample horses during Endurance Rides.
- A study on Artificial Intelligence and gait analysis with the aim to see if this data could be a supporting tool in the evaluation of a horse's fitness to compete.



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- And finally, a study on fluid therapy in horses in order to establish fundamental knowledge in an area which is lacking in evidence-based research, with the aim to provide the necessary science to provide correct treatment guidelines as well as areas to strengthen in the FEI Veterinary Regulations.

I mentioned these because I do feel it's important to talk about these studies and to raise awareness, as there is a lot of misinformation in the community, and we are often criticised for our lack of commitment to horse welfare and wellbeing – which could not be further from the truth.

These are just some examples of the different science backed research we engage in, and research takes time, and there is a due process which we must respect if we want solid and data driven conclusions that can lead to actionable recommendations. Processes which are not always followed by many of our critics. And if you do have any questions about any of these research programmes, don't hesitate to get in touch with the FEI Veterinary or Games Operations Teams to find out more.

Alongside the important strides we are taking to further guarantee horse welfare and wellbeing within our sport, we also have important strides we need to take in terms of environmental sustainability.

An area where I believe we have strong credentials, but could definitely do better. There is also a lack of AWARENESS regarding the many resources and tools out there, and there is often a misconception as to who is concerned and what "sustainable" measures might entail.

As presented yesterday during the Sessions, we have dedicated Sustainability Guidelines and a second edition was launched earlier this year, which have been curated specifically for Equestrian Organisers and can be applied in a modular way in order to best suit different needs and circumstances.

We also have some inspiring examples of successful initiatives at Events and in the community which should and could be used as models. But also here there is little awareness or perhaps the perception is misguided, so a lot tends to stay under the radar and we don't get the traction we need in order to really drive greater implementation of sustainability protocols at the rate I believe we should.

So for me the big question is, how can we drive that awareness and shift the perception that sustainability is only relevant to the select few, is time consuming, expensive, and a nice to have but not a necessity...

Because it is a necessity, and everyone needs to get on board – whether you are hosting a World Championship at a temporary venue or are the owner of a small-scale equestrian yard, your actions can make a big difference. It's not about radically changing the way you run your events, your yard, or your business – it's about adopting a mindset that makes sustainability part of the plan rather than an afterthought.



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When I attended the World Horse Welfare Conference in London on Sustainability two weeks ago, this was my overarching impression. While there is a clear desire and passion to make a difference and find new ways of doing things that are more sustainable, many of the lessons learned and the resources we have in our repertoire are simply not known.

So there is a gap we need to fill. And rather than working separately in our own spaces, we need to come together and shine a light on best practice, and create an expectation and a standard for all our stakeholders to champion. This needs to be part of our daily mantra and of course part of OUR mindset.

And I know this is at the top of all of your personal and professional minds because we are ultimately doing this for our kids – the youth of today - who will inherit our mistakes but hopefully also our solutions and our mindset!

As for accessibility, which is very much about making our sport and our events more inclusive, this was also discussed during the Sessions yesterday, and again, we have some solid examples of how Organisers have planned around accessibility. And we now have Guidelines for our Organisers which the FEI created based on the lessons learned at major Championships these last 2-3 years.

But we need to spread the word, and raise the bar in terms of our expectations when it comes to making Events more accessible. And once again, we need to shift perception – because this won't cost more and it won't take more time, but it does require including accessibility into planning from the very start and not as an afterthought.

These are all facets or areas which we know aside from their intrinsic benefits also have a strong influence on society's perception and acceptance of our sport.

And ultimately, our sport is only as strong as our COLLECTIVE social licence to operate, and we need to work TOGETHER if we want to succeed and ensure a bright future for the next generation of equestrians.

Good governance and earning the trust of the community is another key pillar in our social licence to operate, and I believe TOGETHER, we have created a strong ecosystem, where the expectations in terms of governance are high, and we all understand the role we have to play if we want to have a seat at the table.

I am pleased to say that our efforts have been recognised and once again we have been designated as a leading International Federation in terms of governance by the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations.

Our Rules Revision process is an example of our solid governance protocols, and I am grateful to all the Federations, the FEI Committees, and Official Stakeholders for their valuable contributions and feedback over the past few months - as well as the FEI HQ team - and I hope the Rules Session yesterday where we discussed the key changes to be voted at the GA today was beneficial.

I understand not everyone agrees with every proposed rule change, and this is a reflection of our very diverse community. But as always, we have all the cards on



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the table, the rationale for all decisions is clearly outlined, and we have the best interest of the sport, and our number one stakeholder the horse, at heart.

Before we jump right into the busy agenda ahead of us (and all the voting), I wanted to take a small moment to talk about the incredible year we have had from a sporting perspective, and the challenging economic context in which we are operating, and were prepared for, but will need to continue to adjust to.

It was no surprise that 2023 was going to be challenging. General uncertainty in the global markets, rising costs and inflation in a post Covid era and the ongoing war in Ukraine inevitably had a toll on the FEI's financial results for 2022.

With a loss on our portfolio of almost 6million, we were able to limit the damage and absorb an important part of this loss, so that we are left with a final deficit of 2.5million.

This had been anticipated to an extent, but I do want to reassure you that the FEI remains financially healthy.

Nevertheless, we must be vigilant and ready to adapt in a changing economic landscape, so we have started the process of an internal audit to look at our revenues and expenses and to make sure that our operational budget is sustainable for the future. An area which I see as an important part of the legacy of my presidency.

And on the note of presidential legacy – I recently had the pleasure and honour of meeting up with my predecessors FEI Presidents The Princess Royal and HRH Princess Haya, and I am happy to report that their enthusiasm and appreciation for equestrian sports remains high, and that they are in good health and very active.

Very active is also how I would describe the year we have just had – and what we can expect in the future...

2023 on a sporting front was tremendous and also relentless!

We continued to increase the number of events in the FEI Calendar and can show that we are well and truly back on track with the rising trends from the pre-Covid phase.

If we compare 2022 to 2019, which is our most recent pre-covid year and our reference, we were already back on track with 4,545 Events, and close to our pre-covid numbers.

Then for this year – 2023 – even though it's not over yet, we are expected finish on 4,832 Events – so more than in 2019 and representing a 6.3% increase compared to 2022. This is an unprecedented growth in the last decade and an important milestone.

And, looking ahead, in 2024, we have 4,948 Events in the Calendar, which is more than 2023, so again, very promising figures for our sport,



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In addition, looking at the overall number of athletes starting at FEI Events, in 2019 **413'105** FEI Athletes attended FEI Events.

And in 2022, even if the number of events was **3.46% lower than 2019**, the number of athletes attending FEI Events was up to **427'817**, which represents a **3.56%** increase in the overall attendance of FEI Athletes.

So once again, figures which are increasing and going in the right direction, and show that we are in very good health!

We witnessed brilliant performances and heart-warming team spirit at World and continental Championships for seniors, youth, young horses, Nations Cup qualifiers, Finals and designated Olympic qualifying events for the different Regional Groups.

We had a trio of fabulous World Cup Finals in Omaha for Jumping, Dressage and Vaulting, and Bordeaux for Driving.

And lastly, although I could go on, we saw many firsts at the Asian and Pan American Games – two major events I had the pleasure of attending – with new nations competing and reaching the podium. But also new milestones in terms of the level of competition, and the diversity of the Officials taking part.

As for next year, well it's already front and centre in all our minds.

We are on the Road to Paris – this is certain.

23 Nations have already qualified to send one or more teams to the Olympic and Paralympic Games – and there are still some more to come in Dressage, Para Dressage and Eventing with the composite team allocations based on Olympic Rankings and Regional Rankings.

A special mention must go to the seven nations that have covered all their bases and already secured team slots across the four disciplines of Jumping, Dressage, Eventing and Para Dressage – namely France, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Sweden, The Netherlands, and the USA.

We could not have dreamed of a more spectacular venue, and we are working hand in hand with the Paris 2024 Organising team and GL Events to not only preserve but also celebrate the beauty and historic significance of Versailles. We already know, this will be one of the iconic images from these Games, and there will be huge interest to capture equestrian sport with this fabulous backdrop.

Of course, this comes with a big responsibility but also plenty of opportunities, and it's on all of us to make sure that we make the most of these opportunities to showcase the very best of our sport, who we are as a community, and what we stand for.

This is going to be a COLLECTIVE effort – you will have noted this is a recurring theme in today's opening speech - and I am confident that TOGETHER we will deliver mighty and memorable Games for all the right reasons.



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Another highlight on the 2024 sporting calendar is the launch of the Longines League of Nations, an exciting refresh of our sport's oldest and most prestigious team series, and the result of a consultative process, which I am proud to say was not a compromise.

That was one of the overarching criteria when we started to review the series with all the key stakeholders, that we could not round all the corners, please everyone and expect to succeed in today's competitive and changing sporting and media landscapes.

And I believe we have achieved what we set out to do. We knew we had the trust and overarching support from our Top Partner Longines and special thanks here to our great friend and supporter Urs Schiendorfer.

We had to be brave and committed to the outcome if we were to succeed. The FEI will naturally do everything its power to ensure the series succeeds – but I want to reiterate that the Longines League of Nations is not about the FEI, it's not for the FEI, it's about OUR sport, and represents OUR past, OUR future, and the values which we believe are at the core of everything that we do.

So, it is in ALL OUR interests to invest and give our very best to ensure this historic series remains iconic for generations to come.

We have a busy day ahead of us, so thank you in advance to all National Federations, Regional and Continental Associations, and our Official stakeholders for your valuable contributions, your continued support and professionalism. Thank you to all the Organisers of our Events, to our Officials, Athletes and dedicated sport personnel, the media and to our sponsors.

With a special thanks for our Top Partner Longines, with whom we celebrated 10 years partnership in 2023, for contributing wholeheartedly to the development and promotion of the very best of equestrian sport.

And last but not least, following this busy year, and before get stuck into the agenda, I would like to thank all the volunteers whose input and insights has been solicited more than ever these past years, the Committee Members, as well as the FEI Board and the wonderful FEI HQ staff for your unflinching and continuous support.

We are a diverse community, but we have a common destiny, and the choices you make today will affect our sport tomorrow.

So let's make this General Assembly count. Let's focus on our collective responsibility and make decisions we know are in the interest of our collective destiny. Let's use our collective expertise for the greater good.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

But first, before we move on, let us remember the important individuals we lost since the GA 2022. Individuals that were part of our community and have shaped



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our sport – at local, national, regional and international level. Can I ask you to raise please.

Minute of silence

Thank you for your time and let's go to work now.

Sabrina, the floor is yours.

