



**FEI HYBRID
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA
10-13 NOVEMBER 2022**

**FEI General Assembly, 13 November 2022
Opening Speech – FEI President**

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

Good morning and welcome to the FEI Hybrid General Assembly 2022 in Cape Town, South Africa.

This time we made it! We should have held our General Assembly in South Africa already two years ago in 2020, but Covid-19 got in the way. So after a virtual General Assembly in 2020 and a hybrid one in Antwerp last year, I want to extend our sincere thanks to the South African Equestrian Federation, especially their President Ian Sanne and Secretary General Sharlene Venter, for their flexibility and warm welcome when hosting the GA 2020 +2 here in Cape Town.

With time, we have further perfected our hybrid capabilities, so I am delighted that we are hosting our second hybrid General Assembly, with 66 National Federations represented by delegates in-person and 42 NFs participating and voting online. Our GA is also being live-streamed for the public and is accessible for all to watch live and in replay on the GA hub, as it has been for several years, with all documents pertaining to this meeting, also publicly available on the very same hub.

We have also a number of official stakeholder groups represented here in person and online, as well as regional and continental associations taking part and using this gathering to plan for the future with their regional counterparts. And of course we have the FEI Board, for whom I am eternally grateful for their time and their wise council, both of which have been solicited more than ever these past years.

It's basically the big FEI Family as we often say, and every year, we come together to review where we stand, the circumstances of our achievements, of our setbacks, as well as where we want to go, and how we intend to get there.

But context is everything...

2022 has been challenging on many fronts and this has also been rewarding and heart-warming – because we have seen once again the powerful strength and resilience of our community to overcome and deliver in the face of adversity.

We discovered much of this strength – or the extent of it – with the Covid-19 pandemic followed by the EHV outbreak in Europe last year – and it certainly developed our confidence in our ability to find solutions, to be flexible and to work together as a team.

The war in Ukraine has been extremely distressing, and we are all saddened by the ongoing conflict and devastation. It was overwhelming at first to know how and where to help effectively, but we were able to establish priorities quickly, and this in part thanks to the past couple of years where we have had to react and respond quickly to ever-changing

situations. I am very happy to welcome the UKR NF President online and the Secretary General here in person in Cape Town.

FEI Solidarity and a number of Federations as well as Associations have played an important role in providing support on the ground to the equestrian community, and we remain committed and will continue to help our Ukrainian colleagues through what will be a difficult winter. The 1 million Swiss franc Solidarity Fund we were able to unblock together with important fundraising by the United States Equestrian Federation has served already well, and we have really targeted our support thanks to a solid partnership with the Ukrainian Equestrian Federation Charity Foundation and great teamwork with the different service providers, the EEF and the National Federations.

We had hoped the situation would improve by the end of this year, and provide some respite to the Ukrainian people, but also that we would be able to lift the restrictions on Russia and Belarus and allow the equestrian community to begin to rebuild the sport in the region. But things have in fact worsened.

Consequently, we had no other choice than to follow the IOC and maintain restrictions in Russia and Belarus in response to their breach of the Olympic Truce and the annexation of territory of another state, territory also of the National Olympic Committee and National Federation.

As a result of this, we recently extended until further notice the measure taken in February of this year regarding events in Russia and Belarus, and therefore for the time being, no FEI events will be held in either country in 2023.

A number of other measures also remain in place for the time being such as the freezing of FEI Solidarity projects and the Emergency Board Resolution prohibiting all Russian and Belarusian Athletes, Horses and Officials from participating in FEI Events. This is not a decision we take lightly in sport, or as a community, because we pride ourselves on our ability to bring people together, above and beyond politics, race or culture.

And we understand that the Russian and Belarusian Athletes and Officials that have nothing to do with the war feel that they are penalised for the actions of their governments. Given the escalation of events, this is a protective measure and we have to maintain to ensure the safety of our athletes and the integrity of our competitions. Believe me when I say that our thoughts are also with the Russian and Belarussian equestrian community and that we hope to welcome them back once this war is over.

There is no winner in this situation. But we will continue our efforts to mitigate the effects of the war, and support our community in the best way we can.

We will also have to mitigate the effects of the war and the repercussions on our finances as the world is going through an energy crisis, and as all industries including equestrian, grip themselves for rising costs and inflation.

So how are the finances of the FEI following Covid-19 and in the context of the conflict in Ukraine?

In many ways, 2021 was better than expected, which made it possible to build our reserves and recover from 2020.

As you will have seen in the annexes, we still have a balanced budget for 2022. But we need to be extremely careful as the markets are very volatile and potentially influence in

a negative way the performance of our portfolio. Although we have set a provision aside to cover financial risks this will probably have an effect on the final balance sheet for 2022.

We are still financially healthy, but according to well-respected authorities in the world, this situation is going to be more complicated for the coming years and this for all sectors and industries.

And while we do not have a crystal ball, it's important we anticipate the impact of this global economic downturn on the activities of our sport. So for this reason, we have been, more than in the past, conservative in our budget for 2023. And given our relative financial health we believe it was important to present to you a balanced budget for 2023.

With all the disruption these recent years, one would have expected the sport to have suffered, and the momentum in our governance related initiatives to have taken a back seat. But there could be nothing further from the truth.

We are fighting strong, and we – as a community - are leading with conviction.

2022 was full of milestones and achievements both on and off the field of play, which have set our sport on a new course.

Grooms. It's taken 100 years to recognise them as an official stakeholder group but we can all safely say this was an important milestone for our sport which has already set in motion some key initiatives that will raise the bar at our events, create better conditions for grooms and in turn for the care and wellbeing of our horses. And we will continue to cooperate and support the International Grooms Association represented here by its founder and director Lucy Katan.

We saw some of these initiatives at the FEI World Championships in Herning and in Pratoni del Vivaro, adding to the great success of these events, where wonderful sporting performances took place. Performances which officially put 11 nations on the road to Paris 2024, with the first 25 Olympic and Paralympic qualifying team slots allocated. I think a special mention must go to Germany and Great Britain for securing team slots in all 4 disciplines! For Germany I am sure you made your former President, my dear friend Breido, who regrettably passed away last week, very, very proud.

The success of these Championships also reaffirmed the decision to allow different bids in order to secure the best conditions for each discipline, and as you will have seen with the recent announcement, a process we have maintained for the FEI World Championships 2026.

And while we are on Paris 2024, having approved the quota last year, and now moving on to approve the Rules, the consultation process and the time we have taken to review these rules has been really beneficial, and I am grateful for the valuable input of the community throughout this process.

As you know, one of our biggest priorities is to ensure equestrian remains on the Olympic and Paralympic programme and remains relevant to audiences around the world that tune in to these Games every four years, whether they tune in to TikTok or traditional linear television.

IOC President Thomas Bach was very complimentary of our sport, of the FEI's efforts and the willingness of our community to embrace change when he attended the FEI 100 Years celebration back in April, and also when he visited in September the FEI Eventing World Championship in Pratoni del Vivaro. We have an incredible sport and the IOC recognises

the value of equestrian. But, we are only as good as our last Games, and we are judged on our performance, so we need to continue to keep our sport safe, attract new fans, engage youth and to do what is necessary to appeal to a global audience.

Like all other sports in the Olympic programme, we are constantly “under review”. And again - Context is everything – as we have to compete with new sports, new media landscapes and new trends.

We have been working on Los Angeles 2028, and recently I travelled to Los Angeles with FEI Secretary General Sabrina Ibáñez to meet with the Organising Committee and to identify together an Equestrian Venue that ticks all the boxes especially cost efficiency by accommodating our three Olympic disciplines and Para Dressage in one venue.

But it will be based on our performance in Paris that our events and disciplines will be confirmed for Los Angeles 2028. And as you all know, one of the biggest challenges for us (but also many other sports) is around broadcast figures. There were issues with Tokyo2020, as many fans were unable to find or understand where they could watch our sport, on top of the unfavourable time zone differences.

This is something we have already started to address, and will actively work to mitigate for Paris and ensure equestrian fans, and new audiences know where to watch our sport during these Games.

It will come as no surprise that in line with our efforts to retain and attract viewers, we continue to invest in our digital and communications presence. Creating heroes, storytelling and setting the scene for wonderful performances is necessary to draw audiences in to watch our sport. And this is a collective effort and vision which we as a community must continue to develop. So we need your active help and to work together to amplify our presence in the global mixed media landscape.

We recently held – and this for the first time – digital seminars aimed at press officers and content creators from our National Federations and our OCs, but also for our athletes and grooms. These were really, really well attended, and the purpose was to share the best practices we have learnt over the years, so that members of our community can use these tips to better promote their equestrian stories to larger audiences, which will also benefit our sport as a whole.

The future is on everyone’s lips – and although this future seems to be uncertain – there is one certainty: The youth of today will become the future of equestrian tomorrow. And they already dictate the popularity of sports online. This is a key demographic we must invest in, and listen to...

With the postponement of the Youth Olympic Games in Dakar from 2022 to 2026, we believe we had to find a suitable replacement in order to avoid to deprive an entire generation of young athletes with the opportunity to compete on a global stage and have an Olympic Dream. Also knowing that their performances and their journey will inspire their peers.

And it certainly was a big stage with our replacement event the FEI Youth Equestrian Games – which ran entirely on the same format as the Youth Olympic Games combining sport with an educational programme supported by the International Committee – held in Aachen in May.

For the 30 young athletes from 30 nations and their entourage, this was an unforgettable experience, and I am sure for our hosts here in South Africa, it was also an unforgettable experience, bringing home individual gold and team bronze as part of Team Africa.

Every decision we make today at this General Assembly, but also in our respective organisations and associations, has to be in the context of the future. There can be no complacency or reticence to change, to keep things as they are. Because the world is changing, the sporting, media and sponsorship landscapes are changing. And as a result the way we present and manage our sports also has to change.

Context is everything and so is good governance...

I want to preface this next part of my opening remarks to congratulate all the FEI members, Committee Members, official Stakeholders and FEI Headquarters staff for their contribution to solid governance and decision making protocols which have once again placed the FEI at the top of the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) Governance Review. This is an achievement we can and should all be very proud of, and a rating which reflects much of the process at our General Assembly week – where dialogue, consultation and transparency take top priority in the decision making process. We don't always agree – but fortunately we can talk about everything.

The future of the Longines FEI Jumping Nations Cup was recently discussed with members of the Jumping community, and the need to change was also the conclusion from this important taskforce meeting held in Lausanne last month. The sustainable future of this wonderful series where honour and competing for your nation is everything, and for whom we have a fantastic sponsor Longines, depends on our ability to adapt to new conditions. And when I say adapt, it's not about compromise, it's about taking a fresh look and creating quite the opposite – an uncompromising product, which is relevant in today's sporting context with a solid and unique identity and representative of the global values of the Nations Cup. And to do this, we will need our National Federations to support our endeavours, and provide us with the tools to make this happen.

Uncompromising is also a good way to describe the Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission, an independent body which we set up in June of this year, in response to growing scrutiny and concerns over the position of horses in sport. Our social licence to operate, so the public's acceptance and approval of our sport and how we manage our sport and safeguard the needs of our equine partner, is not a given and can easily be eroded. We must be proactive and uncompromising in the way we respond to the society in which we operate. It's a question of trust, and we need to earn it, the ball is in our court.

This is the context in which our sport is evolving and these are the discussions we must continue to have openly, if we want to secure a sustainable future.

And we are the FEI Family, so I have every confidence in our collective ability to make the right decisions for our sport in the long term. We are a unique sport and a community fuelled by passion and determination. We are highly resourceful and we certainly don't shy away from challenges.

What we have achieved in 2022 – and since the outbreak of Covid-19 is simply remarkable, and we should all be very proud.

Context is everything, but only if we can work TOGETHER... so on that final note, I would like to thank our National Federations, our Regional and Continental Associations, and our Official stakeholders for representing the interests of your members and for regularly engaging in constructive dialogue with the FEI.

I would also like to thank the Athletes, Officials, Organisers, Owners, Grooms, Trainers, Sponsors – of course especially Longines – and all others that contribute to the success of our sport for their tremendous commitment and for helping deliver the very best of equestrian to a wider public.

And last but not least, I would like to thank all the volunteers – the Committee Members, the newly formed equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission Members, as well as the FEI Board and the wonderful FEI HQ staff for your unfailing and continuous support.

As you know there is also a presidential election on this agenda and I sincerely thank you already for your support to continue our journey together for another - in my case – last four years.

Thank you.

And now before we move on to the order of the day, let's take a moment to reflect and remember the important individuals we lost since the GA 2021. Individuals that were part of our community and that have shaped our sport – at local, national, regional and international level - and they will be dearly missed.

ENDS.