



International
Olympic
Committee

The President

Opening ceremony of the IOC Session

Milan, 2 February 2026

It is so exciting to be here – just a few days before the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games. Thank you to our gracious Italian hosts for welcoming us so warmly in this magnificent place: La Scala. From this stage, generations of artists, opera singers and musicians have inspired their audience through their excellence in artistry, through beauty and emotion. La Scala represents the Italian spirit: a deep love of the arts and life, of human creativity, of blending tradition and innovation. It is the same spirit that will now embrace the world's best winter sport athletes as they prepare to make their Olympic dream come true.

It has been a long journey, but it is truly wonderful to be here in Italy, among our Italian partners and friends. Over the past few days, we have seen the excitement building everywhere. The first athletes are arriving, moving into the Olympic Village, with a sparkle in their eyes. You can feel the anticipation in the air. Everyone you meet cannot wait for the Games to begin. There is an Olympic vibe building in the streets of Milano, in Cortina, and in all host regions and in the hearts of the people across the country.

So, on behalf of the athletes, and of the entire Olympic community, I want to express our heartfelt thanks and gratitude to all of you: Thank you, President Mattarella, Prime Minister Meloni and all regional authorities, mayors and host communities. A special word of thanks goes to the Organising Committee and President Malagò for their unwavering commitment and ambition. We are incredibly grateful for your partnership Milano Cortina 2026 is truly a collective effort. To paraphrase an African saying: it takes an Olympic village to make an athlete's dream come true. Thanks to the efforts of everyone here, the athletes can shine on a magnificent Olympic stage – inspiring the world with their excellence, their artistry, beauty and emotion. Thank you for making this possible – *grazie Italia*.

Milano Cortina will be a new kind of Winter Games: taking athletes and fans to places where winter sport is part of daily life; showcasing existing world-class venues; bringing together tradition and innovation. These will be Games where gender equality reaches new heights, and

iconic landscapes become the stage for human excellence. Because of this pioneering work, Italy is not only hosting the next Winter Games — you are setting the bar high for future Games. And this is something you can be incredibly proud of.

For me personally, these are the first Olympic Winter Games of my presidency — and I could not be more excited to be in Italy. Because Italy embodies passion like no other: passion expressed through art, through sport, through innovation and tradition, through a boundless joy of life. This passion — this unmistakable Italian spirit — will be the heartbeat of Milano Cortina 2026.

The Olympic flame is now completing its journey across this beautiful country, connecting millions of Italians — from great cities to small villages across every region of Italy. Each torchbearer carried a spark of that same spirit, lighting the path to these Games. In just a few days, that flame will ignite the Olympic cauldron, and Italy will once again share its light with the world.

So tonight, let us celebrate this moment together — the beginning of a new chapter in the Olympic story, written with true Italian spirit and Italian passion.

Grazie mille, Italia.