

June 30, 1988

**Letter from the President of the International
Olympic Committee to Roh Tae-Woo with a Proposal
for Further Initiative Between South and North
Korea**

Citation:

"Letter from the President of the International Olympic Committee to Roh Tae-Woo with a Proposal for Further Initiative Between South and North Korea", June 30, 1988, Wilson Center Digital Archive, International Olympic Committee Archives (Switzerland), SEOUL '88, POLITICAL MATTERS 1988-89; SEOUL '88/ POLITIQUE (JANVIER - JUILLET). Obtained for NKIDP by Sergey Radchenko.

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Summary:

Letter from the President of the IOC, Juan Antonio Samaranch, to the President of the Republic of Korea, Roh Tae-Woo, containing a confidential report written by Samuel Pisar of the IOC on South-North negotiations concerning the 1988 Olympics.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

COMITE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIQUE
CHATEU DE VIDY, 1007 LAUSANNE, SUISSE

THE PRESIDENT□

The Honorable Mr. Tae-Woo ROH,
□President of the Republic of Korea,
□SEOUL
□Republic of Korea

CONFIDENTIAL
BY HAND

□Lausanne, 30th June 1988

Dear Mr. President and Friend,

□May I first of all take this opportunity to send you and your family my best personal regards during this important period prior to the Olympic Games in Seoul.

□As we are all only too aware, our joint efforts for almost four years now, whilst enabling the largest ever participation in the Games, have brought very little progress in the reaching of an agreement with North Korea in the hope that the Games of the XXIVth Olympiad prove to be the Games of restored unity within the Olympic family.

I have endeavoured to keep you fully informed of all developments as well as private contacts which we have had for our part up to now, in addition to all our efforts to try to find a possible solution to this question, particularly over the last few months and weeks.

□In this respect, I have asked once of the main advisors of the IOC, Maitre Samuel Pissar, a well-known international lawyer and author, who has followed all negotiations between the two Korean NOCs on our side right from the beginning, to give me his advice in view of the current deadlock situation in which we find ourselves.

□He has given me the enclosed report which I think it might be worth your while reading, since its author has a broad and very in-depth knowledge of international affairs.

□I take the liberty of sending you this confidential report rapidly via your representative in Geneva since I think that time is of the essence and a crucial element in our efforts at this stage.

□I should be extremely grateful to receive your comments regarding this document and I insist that it is the private opinion of our advisor and not an official stance.

□I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

□Yours sincerely,

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□Juan Antonio SAMARANCH

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(stamped confidential)

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PROPOSAL FOR A FURTHER INITIATIVE
BETWEEN SOUTH AND NORTH KOREA

The I.O.C has managed to resolve the immense problems of the two Germanies and the two Chinas. On the eve of the XXIV Olympiad we cannot lightly abandon a last minute effort to resolve the seemingly insoluble problem of the two Koreas.

The challenge is not only to prevent confusion, indeed, violence during the games; I do not think this will happen. It is to avoid increasingly serious incidents in the next few months, and dispel the cloud that hangs over Seoul '88 as a dangerous, unpredictable place one should stay away from. Summit declarations of support for the Olympics do not necessarily help. I believe they tend to be counter-productive, confirming the existence of a growing risk of turbulence. Yet there is an underlying international equation that could still make the Seoul games the most universal and exciting ever.

East and West are in a posture of detente: neither Washington nor Moscow want incidents that might poison the improving climate. Beyond that, the Soviets seek normal games because their athletes (after the West's absence from Moscow in 1980, and the East's from Los Angeles in 1984) are in danger of becoming demoralized. Their allies have expressed discontent and a determination not be drawn into new controversies and boycotts. China has also signified its desire that all go well in Seoul. In addition, South Korea is moving to develop commercial relations with Russia and Eastern Europe, and receiving favorable responses. Even Fidel Castro, who has stubbornly stood by Pyongyang, is manifestly uncomfortable in his isolation and unpopular exercise of authority to deny Cuban athletes the right to compete. The fact remains, however, that none of these powerful forces seem able to rob Seoul of an expected triumph.

Having participated at President Samaranch's side in all of the I.O.C.'s contacts and negotiations with the two Koreas, I am convinced that the key to the solution, if it still exists, is now with [illegible]. The central issues are not which and how many events are allocated to North Korea (that has pretty much been decided, and the games are unalterably Seoul's); or whether Pyongyang will "co-host" (this is essentially semantic issue: holding any event in the North is inevitably a "co-hosting"); or how many tens of thousands of Olympic Family members will cross the demarcation line (a much smaller number might be enough if the Pyongyang events were held in a small Olympic enclave).

To my mind the situation calls for an imaginative act of statesmanship à la Sadat by

the South Korean leadership. I am not suggesting that President Roh travel to the North, or take any of the physical or political risks assumed by the Egyptian leader. But I believe that if Sadat and Begin could develop a momentary dialogue leading to a truce, and eventually peace over the Sinai, Roh and Kim Il Sung could do something similar at least as regards the games, if not the reunification.

My suggestion is that Roh undertake an audacious initiative by addressing Kim Il Sung directly, to suggest a physical and psychological truce, whereby military threats and political invective would be suspended for the duration of the Olympiad, as in ancient Greece, so the Games can proceed on a "co-hosted" basis in the historical interest of all the Korean people. Such a truce (with a lowered military profile by all concerned) may later help to open a more permanent dialogue between the two divided parts of the peninsula. It would not be the first time that sport and sportsmanship contributed to a diplomacy of reconciliation and peace.

For such an unconventional move to succeed, the address to the North must be non-polemical, putting it momentarily as a co-equal on center stage. (I can imagine the diplomatic skill and literary eloquence with which it could be formulated.)

The current South Korean mentality appears to be cast in marble: "let's humiliate the North with a highly successful Olympics in the South, then we will be able to negotiate from strength". This attitude should be shelved, at least for the time being. It seems to me wiser, given the enormous stakes for which South Korea is playing, to try a more flexible approach, leading to athletic and other contacts in limited areas. An approach of this type could, with luck, calm the students and radicals in the South, and consolidate Roh's political stature in Korea and the world. I believe Washington would not be opposed to such a stance: indeed, I have reason to believe that it would encourage it. Castro (not to mention Moscow and Peking) it might also jump on it to ease North Korea toward moderation vis-à-vis the games.

While this may be too much to expect, the best way to move toward a denouement would be an urgently arranged meeting between two specially empowered and highly authoritative emissaries of South and North Korea, perhaps even the two leaders in person, preferably in the presence of President Samaranch. Messengers of peace, with ready access to Roh, Kim Il Sung, Castro, Washington and Moscow are, fortunately available and can be easily activated for such a mission.

□ Samuel Pissar