

A speech given by Mayor Spyros Zagaris delivered at the presentation of the "Flame of the Marathon Run" in honor of the 2008 Olympics to the City of Xiamen on the Peoples Republic of China.

THE SPEECH OF THE MAYOR OF MARATHON CITY IN THE CITY OF XIAMEN IN THE PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA

It is a great honour and privilege for me to be here today, at the start of the new year, the year of the Beijing Olympics 2008, a special year for the Peoples Republic of China, and in the eve of the Xiamen international marathon race.

As the Mayor of the historic city of Marathon, I bring you greetings from the members of the city council and all its citizens.

My country gave birth to the modern marathon run, when 2500 years ago, in 490 BC, an Athenian army messenger, run the distance from Marathon to Athens, delivering the victory message after the battle of Marathon, a victory that was to be the foundation of civilization during the Greek classical age, which lead later to the development the civilization of Europe.

Honouring this historical event, the great French philosopher Michel Breal and the visionary admirer of Greece, Pierre de Coubertin, include the marathon run as an Olympic event in the first modern Olympic games in 1896 in Athens.

Since then the marathon run is not simply an Olympic event, but it has developed into the most popular mass event, with races organized every year in thousands of cities around the world.

The marathon run, is the only sport event that has taken its name after the name of a city. It is directly related with the highest principles of the Olympic ideals, peace, fair competition and the comradeship of the peoples of all countries and races
The marathon run is the principal sports event that includes the essence and the ideals of athletics, that is the greatness of the human effort, the strength of the human soul, and the fair competition.

On the 3rd of November 2007, in the eve of the Athens classical marathon race, we organized for the first time ever, a very special ceremony of the lighting of the FLAME OF THE MARATHON RUN, that took place near the city of Marathon, in the historical burial site of the ancient dead warriors of the battle of Marathon.

The central idea of this special event, that will be repeated every year in the eve of the Athens classical marathon race, has as its theme, the present day man and his every day effort to regain his inner strength, his vision and the burning desire that he needs in order to complete with success his "daily marathons".

In the epicentre of this event "the Chorus" is searching for strength and for vision, so that its body movements can be completed. The lack of vision, hope, energy and light makes the bodies of the "chorus" dancers go limp, almost dead and the movement of their bodies is with out any meaning. At that very moment, the ancient warrior messenger appears on the stage as "a god from heaven", bringing hope, light and the flame of life and human effort,

so that today's man, can overcome his daily marathon battles.

This is the FLAME OF THE MARATHON RUN, that we lit and was carried from the burial site to the athletic museum in Marathon city, the house of the history of the marathon run, by the young people of the city of Marathon.

Our vision and aim is that this flame lights the start of every marathon run in every city around the world, and with it, it brings a message of peace, and friendship of all the human races, a symbol of the memory to our ancestors and to our civilization.

I consider as very special and important event, that the first "FLAME OF THE MARATHON RUN" is brought here to the city of Xiamen, in the Peoples Republic of China, at the very start of the Olympic year 2008.

Our two countries, that share centuries of rich cultural heritage and have given so much to the civilization of the world, as of today have one more common connection. I wish that the FLAME OF THE MARATHON RUN, brings a special warmth and friendship to the relationship of our two cities, and that will be the start of a special bond between the cities of Xiamen and Marathon.

We are a small municipality in population, but allow me to mention to you the words written by Aristides Elios, in the 2nd century BC, for the city of Marathon. " There is no person anywhere, that does not feel an uplift in his spirit, when he hears the name of Marathon, and to love and respect this city more than any other." With the heritage of the city that gave birth to the modern marathon run, we come here today, in your beautiful city, extending a warm hand to the citizens of Xiamen, and we offer this FLAME OF THE MARATHON RUN in the hope of a better tomorrow, so that sport and our civilization is victorious.

I wish you all, great success in tomorrow's marathon race, and most of all great success to the Olympic games of Beijing.

I thank you all so much