

Report for the XLI ICF Ordinary Congress Oklahoma City, USA, July 2026

Dear colleagues, partners and friends,

The past two years have been a period of progress and transformation for the International Canoe Federation. Together, we have taken important steps to strengthen our organisation, support our members, protect the future of our Olympic disciplines and expand the global reach of paddlesport.

The following report outlines some of the key milestones achieved since the last Congress and reflects our shared commitment to building an even stronger future for the ICF.

Olympic Programme

As we gather here in the Oklahoma city, I want to highlight again the great success of us to secure our Canoe Slalom in LA28 programme, this follows years of collaboration and joint efforts among the ICF, the OKC government and different stakeholders.

As the IOC Session in June launched the Fit for the Future strategy under the leadership of President Kirsty Coventry, the future Olympic sports will be evaluated at discipline level, and we must demonstrate that our disciplines have relevance, strong participation and global fan appeal.

That is why, since last year, we have established a Future Olympic Programme Working Group for Canoe Sprint. Following dedicated discussions and innovative work, the BoD approved proposals to move towards a single distance format and to introduce a new, innovative long-distance format as a strategic direction for further discussions on the future Olympic Canoe Sprint programme.

For canoe slalom, there are some noise on the fact that our sport needs dedicated venue, but with the support of Paddle Australia, Tony, Jess and many other stakeholders, we continue to actively promote and defend Canoe Slalom within the Olympic programme, and I am confident that we are moving in the right direction.

Organizational Review

Following the Congress in Antalya, we launched a comprehensive Organizational Review to ensure the ICF remains a modern, efficient, and well-governed International Federation, ready to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

The review has been built on broad consultation and collaboration. We invited all National Federations and key stakeholders to share their views and suggestions, and every piece of feedback was carefully considered throughout the process. Five working groups, chaired by Mike Chambers, Richard Fox, Kim Pople, Greg Smale and Mario Santos, led the work across the key areas of the review. Together with Cecilia, Lluís, Richard and myself, we formed the Steering Committee, which guided the overall process and ensured a coordinated and transparent approach. Staff in the office led by Cyril provided significant administrative support.

As part of this process, we held town hall meetings with representatives from more than 100 National Federations and engaged in extensive discussions with all Continental Associations, Board Members and other stakeholders. Their valuable contributions helped shape almost 30 governance reform proposals that will be presented to you for your consideration and vote at the Congress.

Our objective has been clear from the beginning: to create a transparent and inclusive process that reflects the voices of our members while strengthening the way we serve our athletes and National Federations, and ensuring that the ICF continues to evolve in line with the highest standards of governance.

Olympic Qualification System

The development of the LA28 Canoe Sprint Olympic Qualification System represents another major achievement for the ICF over the past two years. I am particularly proud of the open, transparent and collaborative approach we adopted throughout the process.

A dedicated working group, chaired by Toshi, brought together the leading experts, while additional input was actively sought from key players and stakeholders. Discussions with team leaders and coaches during the Poznań World Cup, followed by a dedicated workshop with National Federations at the World Championships in Milan, provided invaluable feedback that helped shape the final qualification system.

The result is a qualification system that not only provides a fair and clear pathway for athletes to reach the Olympic Games, but also strengthens the sporting value and visibility of our International competition calendar.

I would like to sincerely thank all members of the working group, as well as every National Federation that contributed to this process. For the first time, the Olympic qualification system was developed through such an open and inclusive consultation process, demonstrating the value of transparency, collaboration and the collective expertise of our community. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my particular gratitude to our European Federations. While the new qualification system presents additional challenges for them, they have nevertheless supported the principle of universality in the interests of the global development of our sprint discipline.

Always moving forward

Financial Optimisation

Over the past two years, the ICF has made significant progress in strengthening its financial position. Through the generous support of the Hungarian and Chinese governments, together with a new strategic approach to broadcasting, marketing and event allocation, we have significantly increased our revenues and, for the first time, reduced our dependence on IOC funding to below 50% of the ICF's total income.

This strong financial position has enabled us not only to maintain our reserves but also to increase them more significantly than planned. Future revenues will now be invested entirely in the development of our sport.

ICF Headquarters in Budapest

The inauguration of the ICF's new headquarters in Budapest last year marked the beginning of an exciting new chapter for our Federation. Together with our offices in Lausanne and Hangzhou, the ICF now operates from three strategic locations.

The new headquarters has enabled us to expand our team and strengthen the organisation. Today, the ICF employs almost 40 staff members representing 14 countries across all five continents. We have also appointed a dedicated continental manager for each Continental Association, ensuring closer cooperation and more effective support for our members around the world.

These investments are already strengthening the way the ICF operates. They enable us to deliver higher-quality events, accelerate the digitalisation of our sport and competition data, enhance the services provided to Continental Associations and National Federations, and, most importantly, provide greater support to our athletes. Over the next two years, our priority will be to further enhance the operational efficiency of the ICF Office and maximise the value of our services for every member.

However, we are also aware that our sport can only continue to develop worldwide if our Continental Associations and National Federations have professional structures in place. We therefore propose to double the financial support provided to our Continental Associations and increase investment across a wide range of development programmes, IT support, events and initiatives that will benefit athletes and National Federations.

Our ambition is simple: to build a modern, innovative and service-oriented International Federation, with strong organisations at every level that creates greater value for every member of the global canoeing community.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my particular thanks to our Continental Associations, which, over the past two years, have worked closely with the ICF leadership to achieve incredible progress in the development of our sport worldwide.

Always moving forward

Expanding Our Presence in Multi-Sport Games

Expanding the presence of ICF disciplines in major International and Continental multi-sport events remains one of our strategic priorities. By creating more opportunities for our athletes to compete on the world stage, we also strengthen the global profile and long-term development of our sport.

Over the past two years, I have worked closely with organising committees, governments and continental sports organisations to promote the inclusion of canoeing in existing and future multi-sport events. Our discussions have covered the Islamic Solidarity Games, the FISU World University Games, the Games of the Portuguese-speaking Countries, and the Commonwealth Games, while continuing to strengthen our position in events such as the World Games, Asian Games, Mediterranean Games and SEA Games.

These efforts are already creating new opportunities for our disciplines, including the promotion of Dragon Boat, SUP, Canoe Polo and Canoe Ocean Racing, and strengthening relationships with key partners around the world. We will continue working to ensure that more ICF disciplines are represented in more multi-sport events, bringing greater opportunities to our athletes and increasing the global impact of our sport.

Expanding Our Playground

Over the past two years, we have continued to expand the global footprint of canoeing by investing in new venues, Centres of Excellence and International events. From the launch of our first Centre of Excellence for Canoe Freestyle in Columbus and the growing Hub of Excellence in Hangzhou, to the development of new canoe sprint and slalom venues in Kazakhstan, South Korea, Azerbaijan and Australia, we are creating together with our National Federations new opportunities for athletes and coaches around the world and raise the profile of our sport worldwide.

At the same time, the inaugural ICF Paddle Summit in Hangzhou brought together all ICF disciplines and leadership to strengthen collaboration and shape the future of paddlesport. We have also continued to globalise our events, with landmark World Championships held for the first time in Asia, the Arabian Peninsula and Africa, demonstrating our commitment to bringing canoeing to new regions and communities.

By expanding our playground, we are not only creating more places to train and compete, but also laying the foundation for the sustainable growth of paddlesport across all continents.

Olympic Movement

With two IOC members now from our canoeing family, Jessica Fox and Tony Estanguet, we are better represented than ever before within the IOC. It was also important for us to

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strengthen our relationships with the IOC leadership and at the working level, and to consolidate our position as a competent and reliable partner.

Building the Future Together

Looking ahead, our ambition remains clear: to build a stronger, more innovative and more united Federation.

Having focused primarily on tapping into new sources of income during the first three years of my term of office, and having, I hope, invested wisely in expanding our structures, infrastructure and IT over the past two years, we must now make efficient use of these opportunities together over the next two years.

Change and new strategies always involve letting go of cherished traditions and customs. I am aware that the changes of recent years have placed great demands on you. Not every decision has been an easy one, but we have always been guided by what is best for our sport and for a strong Federation within the Olympic Movement, so that we can not only maintain but also strengthen our position within the Olympic Movement.

Thank you for your trust, your commitment and your continued support. Together, we will continue to grow our sport, create more opportunities for our athletes and National Federations, and shape an even brighter future for the global paddlesport community.

Last but not least, none of our achievements would have been possible without the dedicated staff in our office. I would therefore like to extend my special thanks to our Secretary General and the entire team for their support. What sets them apart is that they do not see their work as mere a job, but are passionate about contributing to the development of our Federation every single day.

Best Regards



Thomas Konietzko
ICF President