

# IOC defends Rio legacy amid green protests

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Protesters hold banners against the Rio 2016 Olympic Games' golf course construction, in front of the entrance of the hotel where the IOC Executive Board meeting is being held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on February 28, 2015

Ecological protests on Saturday dogged the final day of an International Olympic Committee executive board meeting in Rio as green campaigners slated the choice of a nature reserve to hold the golf event next year.

"IOC go home!" protesters yelled at IOC president Thomas Bach as he

exited the plush hotel hosting the meeting just off the iconic Copacabana beach.

"Do you want to talk?" responded Bach, who earlier insisted the Games would provide a lasting legacy.

Protesters greeted the former fencing champion with a storm of boos and banners reading "ecological holocaust", "Thomas Bach is a nature killer" and "The city is not for sale."

IOC communications head Mark Adams said he had met with the group for half an hour and invited them to submit written grievances.

Bach also insisted: "We are ready for a dialogue with everybody."

While the board meeting was still going on ahead of a closing news conference, several protesters from the "Golf for Whom" environmental pressure group tried to gatecrash the event.

One woman yelled "what kind of legacy will we get from these Games? They are destroying the environment."

The woman, aged around 50, said security staff had no right to prevent her entering the hotel lobby and furiously slapped one twice around the head.



The president of the International Olympic Committee, Thomas Bach speaks to the media at the end of an IOC Executive Board meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on February 28, 2015

She also claimed organizers "are cutting down 100-year-old trees—that's a crime" and blasted city authorities for tardy attempts to clear up pollution in Guanabara Bay which will host the sailing events, and the city's long-neglected waterways in general.

Other protesters said they represented protest groups "Occupy Golf" and "Occupy Marina da Gloria", the marina which will host the sailing.

The choice of the golf venue has sparked bitter controversy in Rio, as have reported concessions to the developers who are building more than 100 luxury apartments nearby.

Bach recalled he had worked on a previous Rio Olympic bid more than a

decade ago, saying that having now made a successful bid, "thanks to the Games, progress has already been made if not yet sufficient".

Until it was awarded next year's showpiece in 2009, "Rio did not get the Games and nothing happened" on pollution. "It got worse," Bach said.

He added Rio organizers had pledged they would meet a target of treating 80 percent of the raw sewage which flows into the Bay, despite local authorities saying it is impossible without billions more investment.

Bach insisted although much work remained and the timetable was tight for the Games of August 5-21 of next year, the award to Rio of South America's first ever Olympiad was "clear evidence what a positive legacy these Games are leaving in the infrastructure, the social and in the environmental areas".



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Rio is spending some \$14 billion for the Olympics—private and public money combined—some \$2 billion more than for last year's World Cup in 12 cities.

But the preparations have been dogged by the pollution debate as well as the fact that the economy fell into recession last year on the back of a fourth straight year of pallid growth.

The local currency, the real, is also on the slide with its value against the dollar falling by around a third in recent months.

But Bach, who added that preparations were now entering a "very important time", said he had held productive midweek talks with President Dilma Rousseff and both she and her cabinet had said they were totally committed to making the Games a success.

He said the event would leave "many positive legacies", including wider access to upgraded public transport and said the Games would be "maybe the most inclusive ever" with more than half of 7.5 million tickets costing less than \$30 while millions could see the likes of marathon and rowing action for free.

"Literally millions of Brazilians will have free access to share the Olympic spirit at first hand," Bach concluded.

This week's IOC meeting followed an eighth visit to Rio by the body's coordination commission, which praised what it termed clear signs of progress despite the ongoing environmental concerns.

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