

CONTINENTAL COUNCIL MEETING

Panorama Room, Paradise Hotel, Busan, Korea Republic
Tuesday 20 February 2024 – 10h00 to 13h00 KST

MINUTES

CC members in attendance:

SÖRLING Petra	President
LIU Guoliang	Deputy President
AL-MOHANNADI Khalil	Senior Executive Vice-President & ATTU President
MESHREF Alaa	Executive Vice-President – Finance
AZEVEDO Alaor	Executive Vice-President
MAEHARA Masahiro	Executive Vice-President
NATRAN Roland	Executive Vice-President
OSHODI Wahid	Executive Vice-President
SYMONS Graham	Executive Vice-President
LIU Shiwen (via Zoom®)	Athlete's Commission Co-Chair
EL-SALHY Khaled	ATTU President
MOURA Pedro	ETTU Acting President
SANDLEY Sarah	ITTF-Oceania Deputy President
VILA Juan	ITTF Americas President

Staff in attendance:

DAINTON Steve	ITTF Group CEO
CALIN Raul	ITTF Secretary General
BESSAH Mounir	ITTF Deputy Secretary General
ANDERSSON Mikael	ITTF Sports Director

Apologies:

RYU Seung-Min	IOC Member
ACHANTA Sharath Kamal	Athlete's Commission Co-Chair

1. Welcome from the ITTF President

Ms SÖRLING welcomed all in attendance and conducted a roll call, noting the apology of Mr RYU being busy with the organisation of the World Team Table Tennis Championships Finals Busan 2024 (WTTTC). Ms SÖRLING mentioned that the WTTTC is showing a positive start for 2024, and hoped that the rest of the year would continue improving after the pandemic. Ms SÖRLING referred to the adjusted structure, which aims to serve better the ITTF Membership, referred to the events calendar, with more international competitions across the continents, and the return of the World Cups, which was initiated in Chengdu with the Mixed Team Cup, being an outstanding success. Ms SÖRLING looked forward to engaging further in the meeting, during the next few days, and for the Continental Council to debate and discuss.

2. Welcome from the EB member in charge of the Continental Council

Mr AL-MOHANNADI was pleased to see all in attendance and hoped to discuss the future growth of table tennis. Mr AL-MOHANNADI referred to the good start of the year, particularly having (almost) confirmed three Grand Smashes for the first time, in addition to five WTT Champions and many Star Contenders, reflecting that it will be a packed year

for the sport along with the Olympic Games. Mr AL-MOHANNADI also referred to the Continental Championships being held in 2024 and the fact that all Continents will have elections in 2024, hoping they will go smoothly. Mr AL-MOHANNADI mentioned the preparation for the WTTTC 2025, expressing his hope to see everyone in the room today again in Qatar in 2025. Mr AL-MOHANNADI noted that the EB, alongside the Continental Presidents, are all one team and here to work for table tennis, hoping the focus is on the ongoing WTTTC in Busan and the upcoming Olympic Games in Paris, as there is still more than a year till 2025 AGM.

3. Minutes of the previous Continental Council meeting

3.1. Approval of the Minutes from the last meeting

It was agreed to review the draft circulated and provide feedback, if any, by Friday, 23rd February 2024.

3.2. Business arising from the Minutes

There was no business arising from the minutes.

Ms SÖRLING welcomed Mr DAINTON to address the Continental Council before moving on to Agenda Item 4.

Mr DAINTON referred to 2023 as the first year coming out of the pandemic, however, much of the World was still reeling from the effects, including WTT and ITTF. This encouraged changes to be made to the organisation, specifically in the staffing structure. Mr DAINTON highlighted a few of them, noting that Mr BESSAH would be taking on more of the event business side for ITTF, and Mr ANDERSSON would be taking on the sports development role. Mr DAINTON suggested the Continental representatives in attendance to engage over the next few days with the senior staff to discuss calendar planning and other technical matters. Mr DAINTON echoed previous speeches, referring to 2024 as an excellent year for table tennis, with the Olympic Games, World Championships, the World Cups coming back, three Grand Smashes and other WTT major events, which together means the biggest year ever (in table tennis). Mr DAINTON hoped everyone would be excited about it and suggested the continental representatives to explore how to integrate continental events as well and to make them successful.

4. Continental President Report – Africa

Mr Khaled EL-SALHY noted that since the previous Continental Council meeting at the ITTF Summit in Bangkok, there had been two more events in Africa held before the end of the year, the first being the African Senior Championships in Tunisia, which was a very well organised event, serving as a qualification event for the WTTTC in Busan, as well as for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games in teams and mixed doubles. The second major event since Bangkok was the African Para Championships, held in Egypt in September. It was an excellent event held in a brand new venue that was more accessible for Para players and also served as the African qualification for the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games.

Mr EL-SALHY noted two pending items related to the 2023 MCA: a partial contribution pending for the North Regional Championships held in Libya and the requested exceptional contribution for the African Para Championships.

To conclude his report, Mr EL-SALHY referred to the progress with the calendar for 2024, with one regional event being held already (North) and other regional events planned after Busan, all serving as qualification for the African Championships, which will be in Ethiopia in October 2024, and looked forward to finalising the MCA agreement for 2024.

5. Continental President Report – Americas

Mr Juan VILA noted that 2023 has been a fruitful year for the Americas. It was the first time after the pandemic that the entire planned calendar of events was fulfilled, with a total of 38 international events. Mr VILA felt that the continent's commitment to the implementation of the MCAs had been fulfilled well, referring in particular to the objective of transparency.

Mr VILA also referred to the first meeting of the ITTF Americas strategic plan, held in Guatemala at the beginning of February. The aim of ITTF Americas being to pursue financial independence.

Mr VILA referred to the Continental Championships held in Havana, Cuba, qualifying for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, to the Continental Youth Championships held in Charleston, USA, as well as the first-ever Continental Masters Championships also held in the USA, and the U11 & U13 Continental Championships in Mosquera, Colombia. Mr VILA reported being pleased with how USA Table Tennis is integrating itself fully into the ITTF Americas.

Mr VILA also touched on the regional events held in 2023.

To conclude his report, Mr VILA referred to the organisation's financial health, with the permanent observance of the auditing of the accounts.

6. Continental President Report – Asia

Mr AL-MOHANNADI reported on the Asian Junior Championships held in Qatar, the Asian Championships and ATTU AGM held in the Korean Republic, and the Asian Games held in Hangzhou, China.

Mr AL-MOHANNADI added that with the importance of the Olympic Games this year, all regional events are confirmed, as well as the Asian Youth Championships to be held in Chongqing, China, the Asian Championships and AGM to be held for the first time in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and the Asian Cup at the end of the year in China.

Mr AL-MOHANNADI referred the CC colleagues for more details to the ATTU's report included in the AGM package.

7. Continental President Report – Europe

Mr Pedro MOURA noted that since the report to the ITTF Council in August, two successful events had been organised in Europe: the European Team Championships held in September in Malmö, Sweden, and the Europe Top 16 held in January 2024 in Montreux, Switzerland. Both had very good organisation and a full house of spectators.

Mr MOURA wished to bring another topic to the table and referred to an email of 1 February from the ITTF rankings, which reported the decision taken by the EB that the official ranking to be used for seeding at Paris would be the one published on 16 July 2024. This decision was taken despite the three communications that the ETTU had sent to the ITTF. Mr MOURA noted that this would be entirely unfair to the European players as this decision would prevent them from using the points earned in the European Games. Mr MOURA expressed that it has been difficult for the ETTU to understand this decision from the EB and requested to understand the rationale behind the decision without taking into consideration the ETTU's request and the process for the decision.

Mr AL-MOHANNADI noted that it was not an individual decision and that it was a decision taken by the EB. Mr AL-MOHANNADI proposed that the EB could discuss this issue at the next meeting of the EB on 25 February 2024, as it would be important for the athletes involved.

Mr CALIN noted that at the meeting held on 28 May 2023 in Durban, Mr ACHANTA, Co-Chair of the Athletes Commission, requested the EB to free up between 4 and 6 weeks before the Olympic Games on the calendar so that athletes could focus on the preparation for the Games and perform at their best. Subsequently, the letter from the ETTU had come through Mr ANDERSSON and was passed later to Mr DAINTON, then to the World Ranking Working Group, where a recommendation was made. The recommendation went to the EB, and the EB had a meeting on 25 October where it was preferred not to have an open vote but an online vote, and the result of the vote was to not make any changes. Subsequent letters from the ETTU in November, the French Table Tennis Association, and the French Olympic Committee were received and tabled at the EB meeting in Lausanne in December. Mr RYU was asked to give an Athlete's Commission opinion, and after it was received, the EB was given three days to vote. The result of the vote was what was published on 1 February 2024.

Mr DAINTON wished to note the process that in all cases, the information was sent out by Mr CALIN informing of the situation, the details, the pros and cons of the options, and the vote had come out as it did.

Mr OSHODI noted that this goes back a bit earlier, when the EB decided not to extend the points of the World Championships and that it would not impact the Olympic Games as well. Mr OSHODI highlighted that where the EB makes a decision, it is a collective decision; however, this can be looked at again if the EB decides so.

Mr MOURA thanked Mr AL-MOHANNADI, Mr CALIN, Mr DAINTON and Mr OSHODI for their comments and explanations. Mr MOURA considered that there was no rationale behind the decision and hoped that the EB could re-discuss this matter at the meeting on Sunday.

However, as the ETTU will not accept this decision, and in the spirit of transparency and for the good working relationship, Mr MOURA informed the EB that the ETTU would be submitting a claim at the ITTF Tribunal on Wednesday, 21st February 2024.

Ms SÖRLING thanked everyone for their contributions and suggested, following Mr AL-MOHANNADI's recommendation, rediscussing this at the EB meeting on Sunday and asking Mr MOURA to explain to the other Continental Representatives the implications of not having the European Games count for the Olympic Games seeding.

Mr MOURA explained that the European Games ended on 1st July 2023, and WR points have one-year validity. If the EB decided to use the week of 16 July 2024 points for seeding, the points from the European Games would not be included and would hurt the European players in their seeding. Mr MOURA gave some practical examples and added that it would be the only continent with just one continental event counting for seeding, in fact, the smaller event, the Europe Top-16, where only 16 men and 16 women compete, and without Mixed Doubles.

Ms SANDLEY wished to clarify whether the voting was secret and, if so, why and how the decision was arrived at.

Mr OSHODI noted that it is not unusual to have online voting and that it prevents voters from seeing who voted in which way. Mr OSHODI insisted that the process was followed, and there was a rationale, unlike what Mr MOURA had suggested. Mr OSHODI noted that the 1-year validity was the rationale. Mr OSHODI noted that it would be important to make a proper case. Here, the question is why there should be an exception for the validity of the points from the European Games to be extended.

Mr MOURA clarified that he did not mean to say that the process was wrong and wished to query why the EB did not use the same date for World Ranking qualification of the Olympic Games in June. If this date is used, it would not be breaking the rule or making an exception for the ETTU. Mr MOURA additionally noted that he wanted the European players to be able to compete at the same level as everyone else and not be awarded special treatment or exceptions.

Ms SÖRLING noted the two important pathways from this discussion: (i) ETTU will be taking this further to the ITTF Tribunal, and (ii) a proposal by the ATTU President to discuss this item at the next EB meeting on Sunday.

Mr VILA wished to remind everyone to defend the interests of the athletes and that the reason everyone in the room is present today is for the athletes. Not forgetting the words of Mr OSHODI, Mr VILA expressed that he would like to join the ETTU's request for the EB to review this matter again for the interest of the players. Mr VILA noted that transparency, fair play, and the weight of the athletes should drive all decisions.

On the request for clarification of the following steps, Mr SÖRLING suggested waiting until the Athletes Commission representatives are available to confirm whether the point to the EB meeting agenda will be added for 25th February.

8. Continental President Report – Oceania

Ms SANDLEY was invited to present the report for the continent of Oceania on behalf of Mr MOORE.

Ms SANDLEY provided background on Oceania’s geographical, ethnic and economic diversity. In terms of table tennis, the same diversity exists with few resources in general. There is a need to address the relevancy of ITTF and ITTF Oceania. Ms SANDLEY reported that only 11 out of 24 of the Member Associations of the Continent attended the last AGM, and a special GM was held to update the constitution to improve gender balance. Ms SANDLEY noted that ITTF-Oceania currently faces issues with two Member Associations not abiding by principles of Good Governance and added that ITTF-Oceania wants to align itself strategically with the ITTF, particularly after the resignation of ITTF-Oceania CEO in December, as a joint hiring process with the ITTF is being held.

Ms SANDLEY concluded by thanking the Continental Council for the friendship and respect extended to Oceania and echoed Mr VILA’s comments that ITTF Oceania is here for its athletes.

Ms SANDLEY referred to the events successfully conducted in 2023 and spoke about the focus for 2024, highlighting the importance of the resources agreed in the MCA.

Ms SÖRLING thanked Ms SANDLEY for her report and for the hard work being done in the Continent.

9. World Championships Update / Qualification / Information

Mr BESSAH was invited to address the Continental Council.

Mr BESSAH brought attention to the ITTF members portal, where the meetings for the ITTF Summit are listed, and wished to note the efforts of Mr RYU, the LOC, and KTTA in making the facilities available for the Summit.

Mr BESSAH noted the WTTTC 2025 pathway, which would start after this event and the qualifications for these World Champions. The ITTF will publish the pathways on 31 May for the World Championships in 2025. An ITTF regional manager has been appointed and will contact the Continental Federations to discuss the possibilities and plans for the best possible pathways for the players on each continent.

As for the WTTTC 2026 pathways, a Resolution will be tabled at the next meeting of the ITTF Council. Mr CALIN noted that the EB decided to put forward this Resolution following the Proposition that passed in Bangkok to increase the size from 40 to 64 teams. Mr CALIN requested support for this Resolution to ensure having appropriate time to elaborate a proposal for 2026.

Mr BESSAH presented on the ITTF World Cups, thanking all for their support and the CTTA for their help in having the event back in Macau. USD1m in prize money has been secured

for the event and a grant of USD6,000 for each player attending the event. There are a total of 96 players (men and women) qualified and will be attending the World Cups.

Ms SÖRLING noted that everyone is extremely happy to have the World Cup events back.

Mr MOURA congratulated the ITTF for the WTTTC Finals event, and also for the excellent idea of the Mixed Team World Cup.

Mr EL-SALHY wished to clarify how the ITTF will determine the qualifications for the World Cups, and whether it would be according to the next African Cup (held in May) or by World Ranking.

Mr BESSAH clarified that the selection will be taken from the African players in the World Ranking. Mr BESSAH informed that the ITTF is looking to publish the prospectus for the event by 27 February, and that the selection will include the WR points from the WTTTC Busan.

Mr ANDERSSON queried when the World Cups are going to be played as it affects calendar planning for Continental Cups in the future. The same question for the Mixed Team World Cup. It is an attractive event to play, but the countries must be able to plan.

Ms SÖRLING acknowledged and concurred that calendar planning is very important, especially concerning qualification pathways.

10. Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games

Mr CALIN was invited to address the Continental Council.

Mr CALIN noted that the World Mixed Doubles Qualification (WMDQ) event is scheduled for April in Havirov, and the Continental Singles Qualification would be within 6-19 May. The Continental Singles World Ranking selection would be 11th June, and World Singles World Ranking selection would be 18th June.

Mr EL-SALHY noted that there is a challenge to reschedule the continental qualification due to venue scheduling issues and Mr CALIN suggested that it would be important to ensure that the event is completed by the 19th of May.

In relation to the Paralympic Singles World Qualification to be held in Pattaya, Mr CALIN provided statistics on the number of players from Russia and Belarus who have submitted their conditions of participation to attend ITTF events as "Individual Neutral Athletes" (AIN) to date. The CC noted that their first expected participation will be at the Para Open in Astana. Mr CALIN noted that the ITTF would be monitoring and hoped that everything would go smoothly.

Mr MOURA noted that the WMDQ will be held in Czechia and queried whether Russian and Belarusian players will be able to get into the country. Mr CALIN indicated that work will be done with the LOC to ensure that the visas are granted.

11. Dakar 2026 Youth Olympic Games

Mr CALIN was invited to address the Continental Council.

Mr CALIN noted that the Dakar Youth Olympic Games were meant to be held in 2022 but were postponed by an IOC decision and pushed to 2026. There have been some challenges, but it is confirmed now from the IOC that there are three main hubs for the competition, and table tennis will be played in the most modern part. Mr CALIN presented the proposed venue for table tennis, however, the challenge is to fit all the competitions in no more than five (5) days. Mr BESSAH and the competition department are looking into the matter and preparing a proposal to be tabled before the Continental Council to look at the format, which is likely to be a knockout format as there are no other viable solutions. The same quotas as for Buenos Aires 2018 have been secured with 32 men and 32 women, but the main difference is that the IOC will not allow mixed doubles to be from different NOCs.

Mr ANDERSSON elaborated further, noting a meeting he had in Lausanne with the representatives of the IOC Sports Department and the possibilities for ITTF to run some development activities prior to the Youth Olympic Games. The IOC wishes to remain with the 15-18 age group, which does not fit the ITTF Youth event series cut-off at 19. Mr ANDERSSON would be trying to push the cut-off age to 19, however, it seems to be a decision taken by the IOC for all the sports.

Ms SÖRLING provided a report on the Winter Youth Olympic Games held in January in Gangwon, which she and Mr RYU attended in their capacity as IOC members. It was a good event with lots of participation and a full venue of spectators.

12. Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games

12.1. Events

Mr CALIN noted that the IOC has confirmed table tennis as one of the sports for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games (LA28 OG), and there is confidence that table tennis will also be included in the Paralympic Games programme (LA28 PG).

A request has been received about the events to be proposed for LA28 OG. The principles that will be taken into consideration when deciding on the events are: the athletes' focus, the promotion of high standards and fairness, and the inspiration of the emerging generations. It is noted that in other sports, the IOC is facing issues where the best athletes are not competing, and the IOC sees the risk of the Olympic Games losing value. The second is the costs and complexity, and to ensure that there is no unexpected increase in quota. The third and fourth aspects when making the planning should focus on gender equality and global appeal. Mr CALIN noted that the aim for the ITTF in the last few years is to add as many events as possible. The question before the Continental Council now is what is the wishlist for LA28 OG. Mr CALIN produced two initial options. Option 1: to try to go for a full programme of World Championships, adding men's and women's to the existing programme, or the possibility to add the mixed team format as in Chengdu. However, it was noted that team events are time-consuming, and it would be a good opportunity for the Continental Council to discuss this in the meeting today.

Mr CALIN noted that the IOC wants ITTF to fill in all potential events to be explored by 1 March 2024. The ITTF does not need to decide which is its priority yet. During this initial phase, the IOC will request a lot of data, particularly results of World and Continental Championships on the proposed events, the TV reach, ticket sales, etc. This data collection would be for the staff to handle, but the Continental Council needs to provide its strategic vision.

Mr DAINTON noted that the last EB meeting was in Lausanne in the IOC house, and it was asked to the IOC Sports Director how to add more events to the Olympic programme for table tennis. The EB were told that it would be difficult in general at the moment. Mr DAINTON noted that the question now would be what would be more realistic for table tennis if something is to be put forward.

Ms SÖRLING reflected that there are five new sports for LA 2028, several of them being team sports, adding that in table tennis there are currently five medal events and that the ITTF should be strategic.

Ms SANDLEY wished to acknowledge the incredible advantage that table tennis has with Ms SÖRLING's election to the IOC. Ms SANDLEY noted consideration around women's players and if there would be any more data for the Continental Council to make a decision. On a personal note, Ms SANDLEY noted that the mixed team events were good but was concerned about the potential detrimental implications on the number of female athletes.

Mr OSHODI opined that looking from the outside, a non-table tennis person would see the mixed teams, men's doubles and women's doubles as an event being played twice. Mr OSHODI noted discussions with Mr ANDERSSON that the event would need to be filtered down to the continents because the qualification would need to be there as well. The sooner the continents can start, the better the validity.

Dr MESHREF added that the Mixed Team World Cup pair's players not being able to play the singles is something to be analysed.

Mr MAEHARA considered the 7 vs 6 events factor.

Mr ANDERSSON agreed with Mr MAEHARA that option 1 would be the best in terms of the number of medals, with 7 events, and that option 1 could be taken but a change of the format should be made to the team event to make it more agile.

Ms SÖRLING acknowledged all comments and noted that some years ago, the Swedish Doubles Pairs of Mattias Falck and Kristian Karlsson were awarded in Sweden with the best "team" of the year award, despite it was a doubles pair and not a team as it is considered in the ITTF. For outsiders, a doubles pairing could be seen as a team. This would be something to consider in how table tennis is perceived, echoing the sentiment expressed by Mr OSHODI.

Mr CALIN noted that TV ratings are very good in table tennis at the Olympic Games, and this has to be considered when speaking with the IOC, not just through formal submissions but also the conversations that the ITTF can have at the different levels.

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The Continental Council agreed to present to the IOC two scenarios: one with six (6) events and one with seven (7) events for the Games of the XXXIV Olympiad in Los Angeles.

13. Master Continental Agreements

Mr CALIN started by thanking the work done by Ms Polona CEHOVIN and Mr Mounir BESSAH in this area in the past years, particularly following the budgetary adjustments that occurred in 2022. Mr CALIN explained that there were some misunderstandings around the specific Development contributions and thanked the Continental Presidents in attendance, Ms SÖRLING, Dr MESHREF and Mr DAINTON, for the meeting held on 24 November 2023. Following that meeting, the EB had its last meeting of the year in Lausanne, and on the recommendation of the CEO, it was proposed to increase the development funds from USD 1m to USD 1.1m for 2023 and 2024. These adjustments (pending the ratification at the AGM on 25th February) could help in clarifying matters and then proceed with the signature of the MCAs.

Mr CALIN added about the meetings being planned in Busan with the key staff responsible for the MCAs implementation in each of the continents, and that following such meetings hopefully the addendums for 2023 and 2024 can be signed.

Dr MESHREF noted that Mr CALIN gave a good framework, and abounded about the strategy that the ITTF has been taking with the limited resources. The balance was quite difficult, but Dr MESHREF was pleased that following the positive meeting with the Continental Federations, this could be fixed with a minor increase.

Mr ANDERSSON echoed Mr CALIN in thanking Ms CEHOVIN and Mr BESSAH for the work done on the MCAs' management. He wished to remind all in attendance of the sports and development session on the 26th of February in Busan. Mr ANDERSSON noted that he would like to talk as much as possible with the Continental Presidents as well as the key staff to discuss the development budgets and programmes for 2024.

Ms SÖRLING also thanked Ms CEHOVIN and Mr BESSAH, indicating that they are moving into new positions from 2024.

14. Any other business

14.1. Summit update

Mr BESSAH was invited to address the Continental Council and encouraged the Continental Presidents to push the Member Associations to attend the meetings in Busan, as they are

important and related to the development of our sport. A list of the planned meetings was presented.

Mr CALIN reminded about the existing bids for the World Para, World Masters, and World Championships that will be presented as part of the Summit in the coming days.

Ms SÖRLING encouraged everyone to take part as much as possible and opened the floor to any other business.

Mr BESSAH presented about the Awards to be presented at the Awards Night.

Ms SANDLEY noted that a candidate had been put forward from ITTF Oceania for the Sustainability Committee and queried about the process and what to expect.

Mr CALIN indicated that as no nominations were received from any Member Association of Oceania by the deadline, the Continental Federation was contacted with the aim of co-opting a member to ensure representation. Mr CALIN noted that no submission has been received from Oceania to date, but if a qualified representative is proposed, the EB may consider co-opting a member.

15. Next Meeting

There being no further business, Ms SÖRLING adjourned the meeting at 12:40 KST.

Petra SÖRLING
ITTF President

Date

Raul CALIN
ITTF Secretary General

Date