

Speech of Mayor Dr. Stephan Keller on the occasion of the Opening Ceremony "Invictus Games 2023" on September 9, 2023, Merkur Spiel Arena

++The spoken version is valid++

[Salutation]

Herzlich Willkommen in Düsseldorf!

It is my great pleasure to welcome all of you tonight!

The day we have all been waiting for, has finally arrived!

The Invictus Games are here!

And what a grand opening it is!

When I looked around this arena during the Parade of Nations just a few moments ago, I could feel the importance of these Games. For me personally, but especially for all of you!

This energy draws you in. The joy and anticipation is infectious and has been filling the streets of our city for the last few days.

All over town, you see flags and team jerseys.

A sea of colors, songs and cheers that perfectly represents what our city is about.

We are vibrant and cosmopolitan.

People from 180 nations call Düsseldorf home.

It is my sincere hope that you will find a little bit of your home here as well during your stay and remember us fondly as you journey on.

Düsseldorf has always been able to inspire an audience with our passion for sports and our expertise in hosting major international events. I am confident that this passion will resonate through the upcoming Invictus Games – inside this stadium and well beyond it.

As Mayor, I feel humbled and privileged to play host to the Invictus Games, as they are so much more than a mere sporting event.

They represent a celebration of the unbreakable resolve that resides within each one of the athletes as they stand before us tonight.

To you, competitors, I say: As we embark on this incredible journey, we will bear witness to your unwavering strength. As audience members, we will see you pushing your limits yet again, all the while knowing that the trials that are behind you are so much bigger than we could ever imagine.

You will let us in to experience your idea of camaraderie. You will inspire us with your sense of purpose, and you will inspire one another in demonstrating that your will to persevere knows no bounds.

The entire city of Düsseldorf stands behind you, cheering you on with every stride, every stroke, and every strain you put forth.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to all the servicemen and -women all around the world who are committed to peace and freedom.

I want them to rest assured that we are aware of the social responsibility we bear.

After all, that is why we gathered here tonight: to give those who have given so much "A home for Respect."

However, none of us would be here if it wasn't for the vision of the Patron of these Games, the esteemed Duke of Sussex.

Sir, your impact on the soldiers and their community cannot be overestimated. We owe you a great debt of gratitude.

To the citizens of Düsseldorf and all guests from around the world, I encourage you: Join us in the stadium and in the venues around, in celebrating these remarkable individuals you see here tonight.

Let us come together as a community to advocate for them, and learn from their incredible stories that are woven into the fabric of these games. Stories that tell us how to get up when beaten down - unyielding and unbroken.

Thank you, and let the Invictus Games begin!