

## Kazakhstan Paralympic Centre Speech

Thank you Ladies and Gentlemen for attending the opening of Kazakhstan's First Paralympic Centre. I'd also like to extend my gratitude and appreciation to our guest speakers for their inspiring stories and words of wisdom.

All of this began with one step - a conversation in 2013 between Julia Karimov and I over the need for sports in Kazakhstan to be more inclusive - not just for the elite, not just for those who can afford it, but for everyone. Each of us should have the opportunity to challenge our bodies and minds in competitive sports and so our journey began in building a central hub to provide world class opportunities in sport for disabled individuals.

Kazakhstan has always been a nation of strength and honour; of determination and dedication. It is the pillars by which our Grandparents told us to stand by and it is these same traits which bind together athletes from across the world.

This centre is not just a place for athletes to train. It is not just a gym with expensive facilities and well ground coffee. It is a statement of Kazakhstan's belief in its people. It is an act of defiance against the limitations people put on us. It is a place to nurture, grow and challenge ourselves.

In Kazakhstan, we have a saying “Вы, должно быть, не зашли слишком далеко, если бы смогли найти свой путь назад”, which means “*You must not have gone too far if you can find your way back.*” You may have noticed that we have put this sign in the eating area of the Centre to remind us all, the staff included, of the mentality which governs success. And in my eyes, each of our athletes and future athletes are beacons of success. Many of them have come from deprived areas, and some of them have only taken up their chosen sport no more than five years ago. Personally, I

look up to each one of them and they teach me something every time I step in here, which I can take with me into the world.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Julia for dreaming with me, to all the staff here at the Centre for your tireless work and helping us achieve this. Without your dedication, passion and support this would not have been possible.

Finally, to our athletes and trainers. In life, your goals should not be limited by what society dictates, or by the confines of your body. Your goals should be as infinite as the dreams we dare to conjure up. And you, our Paralympic athletes, embody this every day. You are already champions in our eyes.