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Olympic Torch Heads to International Space Station

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Russian Mikhail Tyurin holding up the torch with other crew members. **Dmitry Lovetsky**

The international crew aboard the Soyuz TMA-11M spacecraft launched Thursday has successfully delivered the Sochi-2014 Olympic Torch into the cosmos, the Russian Space Agency said.

The spacecraft and its carrier rocket took off from the launching pad in Baikonur, Kazakhstan at 8:14 a.m., Interfax reported. The vessel, carrying Russian cosmonaut Mikhail Tyurin, U.S. astronaut Richard Mastracchio and their Japanese colleague Koichi Wakata is expected to dock today with the International Space Station, where the travelers will join a six-member crew.

Cosmonauts will then carry the torch through every part of the ISS. The torch will be unlit during the ceremony because having an open flame is strictly prohibited on board the ISS for safety reasons.

On Friday, the ISS crew will have a day of rest ahead of the planned spacewalk next day by Kotov and Ryazansky, during which they will stage an hour-long photo session with

the Olympic torch in open space. They will also perform a number of scheduled operations on the station's exterior in the course of four hours outside.

The outer space walk with the Olympic torch will be broadcast live on Russian television before it returns to Earth on Monday with cosmonaut Fyodor Yurchikhin, U.S. astronaut Karen Nyberg and Italian Luka Parmitano, who will be completing their tours at the ISS.

Dmitry Chernyshenko, head of the Sochi 2014 organizing committee, said the torch from the International Space Station will be used to light the large flame in Sochi on the day of opening the Winter Olympics in February.

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