

OPEN LETTER - International Advocacy

Olympics (Paris) : FIDH Calls on IOC to Address Human Rights Violations in Palestine

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In an open letter to D^r. Thomas Bach, President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) has urgently called for immediate and effective measures in response to the escalating and deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in Gaza. Drawing on the precedent set by the IOC's actions against Russia and Belarus, as well as the recent International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling, FIDH emphasizes the necessity for the IOC to uphold its commitment to equality, human rights, and non-discrimination.

D^r. Thomas Bach
President, International Olympic Committee
Château de Vidy
1007 Lausanne
Switzerland

July 20, 2024,

Open Letter to the IOC President : Upholding Olympic Values in Response to Israel's continues Violation of International Law

Dear D^r. Bach,

FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights) urgently calls upon the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to adopt immediate and effective measures in response to the escalating and deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly the situation of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Given the precedent set by the IOC's actions concerning Russia, and Belarus, as well as the recent ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), it is imperative that the IOC upholds its commitment to equality, human rights, and non-discrimination by addressing the current situation with the same vigour and impartiality.

Genocide in Gaza

For over 75 years, Israel has been subjecting the Palestinian people to all types of oppression, including an ongoing 56 years of illegal occupation. This oppression has particularly intensified in the past year. Israel has launched a genocidal campaign against the captive population in Gaza 10 months ago, resulting in the displacement of over 2 million people, the killing of over 38,000 Palestinians, the majority of whom are children and women. It is estimated that an additional 10,000 are missing or dead under the rubble of homes and buildings. The ongoing aggression has

exacerbated the already dire conditions caused by a 17-year blockade, which has been described as an « open-air prison. » In this context, FIDH recognizes the alarming increase in human rights violations and has acknowledged the situation as meeting the qualifications of genocide, alongside other war crimes and crimes against humanity including apartheid.

ICJ Ruling on illegality of Israel's occupation

On July 19, 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Israel's occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory is illegal. The court's decision underscores Israel's denial of the Palestinian rights to self-determination and calls upon the international community to take decisive action against these practices and work towards ending the illegal situation. The Court further concluded that Israel's legislation and measures constitute a breach of Article 3 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which prohibits racial segregation and apartheid. This advisory opinion highlights the urgent need for international bodies and organisations, including the IOC, to respond to the grave injustices inflicted on the Palestinian people and bring to an end the illegal situation in the occupied Palestinian territory including in Gaza.

IOC's Precedent Actions

In the past, the IOC has taken decisive action against regimes committing gross human rights violations. Notably, during the apartheid era in South Africa, the IOC implemented a comprehensive ban on South African athletes. This ban, effective from 1964 to 1992, was a response to the South African government's policies of racial segregation and discrimination. The IOC's decision to exclude South Africa from the Olympics was a significant measure in the fight against apartheid, demonstrating the organisation's commitment to human rights and equality.

More recently, in response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, on February 28, 2022, the IOC recommended that International Sports Federations and event organisers not invite or allow the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes and officials. This decision was guided by the principles enshrined in the Olympic Charter, particularly Rule 50, which emphasizes the IOC's commitment to political neutrality and the promotion of peace. Furthermore, on March 28, 2023, the IOC Executive Board decided on strict eligibility conditions for the participation of individual neutral athletes from Russia and Belarus in the Olympic Games Paris 2024.

Olympic Values and the Need for Action

The Olympics have long been a beacon of hope, justice, and peace, leveraging global attention to spread messages of unity and end conflicts. The IOC's role extends beyond sports ; it involves setting a standard for the global community by actively working to address and rectify international injustices. The selective application of the principles enshrined in the Olympic Charter undermines this role and erodes the foundational values of equality and non-discrimination in sport.

Calls from Civil Society

Civil society organizations, including the Centre for Sport and Human Rights, have called for a consistent application of the IOC's principles. They highlight the need for the IOC to address the deteriorating human rights of the Palestinian people with the same commitment to human rights and equality shown in other situations.

Recommendations for the IOC

The IOC has a profound responsibility to act consistently and uphold the values enshrined in the

Olympic Charter. Article 2 of the Olympic Charter states that the IOC's role is to « encourage and support the promotion of ethics and good governance in sport as well as education of youth through sport and to dedicate its efforts to ensuring that, in sport, the spirit of fair play prevails and violence is banned. » Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter emphasises the IOC's commitment to political neutrality and the promotion of peace within the sporting community. The selective application and double standards in the application of these principles undermine the credibility of the IOC and erode the foundational values of equality and non-discrimination in sport. It is imperative that the IOC takes decisive action to address the injustice inflicted on Palestinians with the same commitment shown in other situations of injustices.

In this context, FIDH recommends the following measures for the IOC to implement :

- **Public Condemnation** : Issue a public statement condemning all forms of violence and human rights violations in the context of Palestine and Israel.
- **Suspension of National Olympic Committees** : Suspend the National Olympic Committees of nations involved in severe and ongoing human rights abuses, as has been done in other conflicts. In this regard, we urge you to suspend Israel from participating, especially while it continues its genocidal actions in Gaza, illegal occupation and violates the rights of the Palestinian people elsewhere, including their right to self-determination.
- **Engagement with Human Rights Organizations** : Collaborate with international human rights organisations to monitor the situation and ensure that the IOC's actions are informed by accurate and up-to-date information. We further urge the IOC to leverage its network, and in good faith to bring to an end injustices in the context of Palestine and other situations globally.
- **Dialogue and Mediation Efforts** : Use the IOC's unique position to leverage pressure to end certain conflicts and wars. We urge you to call for an immediate, long-term, and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza, and a withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Palestinian territory and in line with the ICJ's ruling on the illegality of its occupation.

When states act tyrannically, it is the responsibility of the global community to work together to end atrocity crimes. It is our shared duty to value all lives equally.

FIDH stands ready to support the IOC in these efforts and urges immediate action to ensure that the spirit of the Olympic Movement is preserved and that human rights are protected for all.

Yours sincerely,

Alice Mogwe

President,

FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights)

P.-S.

- FIDH. 22/07/2024 :

<https://www.fidh.org/en/international-advocacy/fidh-calls-on-ioc-to-address-human-rights-violations-in-palestine>