



International
Olympic
Committee

Office of the Director General

Unclassified

Ms Alexandra Xanthaki
Special Rapporteur in the field of
cultural rights

Ms Ashwini K. P.
Special Rapporteur on contemporary
forms of racism, racial
discrimination, xenophobia and
related intolerance

Lausanne, 11 November 2022

Ref. AL OTH 90/2022

Joint Communication from Special Procedures

Dear Ms Xanthaki, Dear Ms Ashwini,

Reference is made to the letter dated 14 September from Ms Xanthaki and Ms Achiume to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which we have been studying with great attention.

We are keen to provide you with further elements to contextualise and respond to your concerns regarding the decisions taken by the IOC Executive Board on 25 and 28 February 2022 respectively. For reference, you will find the full decisions [here](#) and [here](#).

It is the mission of the IOC and the Olympic Games to unite the world in peaceful competition. At the Olympic Games, some 10,500 of the best athletes in the world from 206 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and the IOC Refugee Olympic Team are competitors in sport, but at the same time they live peacefully together under one roof in the Olympic Village.

Equal rights for everyone are enshrined in the Olympic Charter. At the Olympic Games there is no discrimination and everyone respects the same rules; we are all equal. It is also our duty to protect athletes from harassment and abuse. The concern for safety is similarly enshrined in the Olympic Charter.

The Olympic Games are the most powerful demonstration of unity in the world today, and the biggest celebration of humankind with equal rights for everyone participating. **More than half of the world's population follows the Olympic Games.**

Sport always builds bridges and never erects walls. This has also been acknowledged by the United Nations (UN). When the UN General Assembly adopted the post-2015 **Development Agenda**, it included sport as an “important enabler of sustainable development”. The document continued: “**We recognise the growing contribution of sport to the realisation of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives.**” The unifying role of sport and the peace mission of the IOC and the Olympic Games has been acknowledged by multiple other UN resolutions, too, including Human Rights Council resolution 43/18.

In a fragile world, the power of sport to bring the entire world together despite all the existing differences gives hope for a better future. The Olympic Games can never become part of any political dispute, in order to ensure that the world comes together through sport. As an organisation, the IOC must include athletes from all countries, notwithstanding the inevitable existence of political differences. The IOC, as the organiser and owner of the Olympic Games, must stay politically neutral while operating in a highly political world.

But this is not enough: the IOC **needs the support of the world's governments for its mission to bring the world together through sport and to respect the Games' neutrality.**

Before every edition of the Olympic and Paralympic Games and the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, the UN General Assembly passes a resolution calling for the observance of the Olympic Truce for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, building on an ancient tradition. Such a resolution was adopted by consensus and co-sponsored by 173 Member States at the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York on 2 December 2021. While the UN Olympic Truce resolution is directed only at UN Member States, a breach of this resolution is also an infringement of the Fundamental Principles of Olympism, enshrined in the Olympic Charter. This is why, during the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022, IOC President Thomas Bach took the opportunity to call on all political leaders of this world: Give peace a chance!

Four days after the Closing Ceremony, it became clear that these calls had not been heard. When the Russian army invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022 with the help of Belarus, the IOC and the Olympic Movement were placed in a unique situation and an unsolvable dilemma. For two reasons:

Firstly, because the Russian invasion of Ukraine represents a blatant violation of the Olympic Truce that was still in place for the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Beijing 2022, and thus a breach of the Fundamental Principles of Olympism, enshrined in the Olympic Charter. While the Olympic Winter Games had just come to a close, the Paralympic Winter Games were about to start.

Secondly, the situation is unique because of the consequences this war has for the sports world: endangering the safety and security of the athletes and jeopardising the integrity of international sports competitions.

As the leader of the Olympic Movement, the IOC had to react to both: the violation of the Olympic Truce and the Fundamental Principles of Olympism, enshrined in the Olympic Charter; and the risks for athletes and the integrity of international sports competitions.

The IOC condemned the blatant violation of the Olympic Truce and the Fundamental Principles of Olympism, enshrined in the Olympic Charter, just hours after the beginning of the invasion.

To ensure the integrity and safety of international sports competitions and athletes, we recommended that the International Sports Federations not organise any international sports events in Russia or Belarus and, as a principle, not allow Russian and Belarusian athletes or officials to take part in international competitions. These were protective measures.

The IOC needed to do so, because we had realised that some governments were starting to interfere with the responsibility of sports organisations. The IOC had to react because the autonomy of sport and the functioning of the international sports system were at stake. Governments were and are undermining **international sports organisations'** autonomy by deciding who would be allowed to participate in international competitions – and who would not. They do so by not issuing visas to Russian and Belarusian athletes. Some governments are also threatening their athletes with the withdrawal of funding if they compete against Russian or Belarusian athletes. Others are prohibiting athletes from participating in such competitions or are pressuring their athletes, their NOCs, and their National Sports Federations through public opinion.

All of this ultimately endangers the safety and security of athletes and jeopardises the integrity of international sports competitions.

This is why the IOC had to take these protective measures with a very heavy heart – being fully aware that they concerned athletes and sports officials who did not start this war, and who are not responsible for this war.

This situation has put the IOC in an unsolvable dilemma. The IOC cannot fully live up to its Olympic mission, which is to protect the athletes and to unite the entire world in peaceful competition.

The IOC has always agreed and insisted on this principle in the past when athletes from one or another country refused to compete against athletes from another country for political reasons. It has always insisted that unifying peaceful competition is at the core of its mission.

Now, unfortunately, in this unique situation, the only way to protect this mission is to recommend the non-participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes (or, where this is not possible, their participation as neutral athletes).

In this context, it is important to note that the IOC can impose protective measures or sanctions on athletes only with regard to the Olympic Games. All other competitions are within the exclusive remit of the International Sports Federations. To them, the IOC has recommended protective measures. Therefore, remedies apply either as laid out in the statutes of each International Sports Federation or, as far as the Olympic Games are concerned, as laid out in the Olympic Charter. Some Russian sports organisations have challenged the decision of International Sports Organisations before the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), which has thus far turned down the requests for provisional measures to allow the Russian athletes to compete in international competitions of the sports in question.

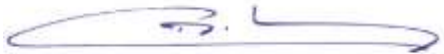
The fact that the IOC cannot overcome the above-mentioned dilemma at this moment must not prevent us from exploring ways of how we can do so in the future. The Olympic Movement wants to live up to its Olympic peace mission and its principles. The IOC has to protect the mission of the Olympic Movement, and that is to be a unifying – not a dividing – force in our already too fragmented world. Together with all people of goodwill, the IOC wants to make its humble contribution to peace.

It did so not too long ago during the Olympic Winter Games PyeongChang 2018, on the brink of potential confrontation on the Korean Peninsula, just a few months before the Opening Ceremony.

By standing together and by always acting according to our principles, the IOC and the Olympic Movement contributed to overcoming these challenges. What began as a seemingly insurmountable situation ended with the unforgettable joint march of the athletes of the NOCs of South and North Korea at the Opening Ceremony. It ended with **the unified women's ice hockey** team showing the world the unifying power of sport. It ended with the Olympic Winter Games PyeongChang 2018 sending a powerful message of peace from the Korean Peninsula to the world.

Thanking you again for your letter, please rest assured that the concerns you express through your questions will be fully taken into account when it comes to further decisions or recommendations by the IOC. Should you have any additional questions or require clarification, we are available for an in-person meeting to discuss this further at a mutually convenient time.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. De Kepper', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Christophe De Kepper
Director General