

Medical Professionals for Human Rights in Iran – Austria

گروه پزشکان و کادر پزشکی مدافع حقوق بشر در ایران- اتریش



Vienna, 03.04.22

**Dear Mr. President Gianni Infantino,
Dear Mrs. General Secretary Fatma Samba Diouf Samoura
Dear Fifa Congress Officers,
Dear Mr. Chairman of the AFC,
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen**

As you can see from various reports, on Tuesday, March 29, 2022, hundreds of Iranian women were not allowed to enter a stadium in the city of Mashhad in north-eastern Iran, despite showing official tickets. They wanted to watch the Iranian national soccer team's match against the Lebanese national team as part of the World Cup qualifiers. The women protested this practice and were insulted and pepper-sprayed by police and security officials. The authorities argued that women were not supposed to be spectators for this match, even though they were officially allowed to buy tickets and had done so.

We condemn this policy of gender discrimination, or in other words, gender apartheid. For decades, the Islamic Republic was the only country besides Afghanistan (under the Taliban regime) where women were not allowed to enter soccer stadiums. Despite Iran's commitment to allow women to attend matches as spectators in accordance with FIFA's rules, Iran has now again blatantly violated these rules.

Therefore, we urge FIFA and AFC to finally act. In accordance with positive laws and disciplinary rules, force Iran to immediately comply with its obligations, hold the perpetrators accountable and punish their actions. Exclusion of the Iranian Football Federation could be an effective consequence. After all, soccer is a very popular mass sport in Iran and it is unacceptable that half of the population is excluded from public games!

FIFA's response to this outrageous violation against Iran can also be exemplary and very effective as a symbol for other sports and other international federations.

Your indifference as leaders of international soccer to the principles of gender non-discrimination perpetuates the oppression of women in Iran and Afghanistan and becomes a tool to reproduce tyranny and religious fascism in these two countries.

Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran– Austria
جامعه دفاع از حقوق بشر در ایران-اتریش

Medical Professionals for Human Rights in Iran – Austria
گروه پزشکان و کادر پزشکی ایرانیان مدافع حقوق بشر

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The solidarity of international organizations such as FIFA and the AFC with the women of these countries supports respect for the human dignity and self-esteem of women in Iran and Afghanistan, and is an effective way to combat the rigidity of thought and the mental block of those in power in these countries.

FIFA, as one of the most powerful sports federations in the world, is expected to hear the voices of the protesting women in these countries, and we call on its members in the FIFA Congress, Executive Committees and other soccer federations to exercise their human responsibility. We appeal to the collective intelligence and rationality of those in charge of the associations not to let those in power in Iran and Afghanistan get away with their ignorance of the official rules, otherwise you will be sacrificing women's and human rights on the altar of your policy of negligence.

What happened in Iran is not an accident. Women in Iran are at the centre of the protest movement and struggle against tyranny and religious dictatorship, and are vehemently campaigning for the realization of their social rights. The Islamic rulers of these countries deliberately insist on the separation of men and women in society and humiliate women under various pretexts. By continuing this policy and spreading the atmosphere of oppression, they aim to create obedient citizens to consolidate their rule.

Dear Mr. Infantino, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, we would like to remind you that during Mr. Infantino's visit in March 2018, Mr. Rouhani, then President of Iran, promised to stop the exclusion of women from football events. About a year later, Mr. Infantino stated in a letter dated June 18, 2019, to Mr. Mehdi Taj, then president of the Iranian Football Federation, that it was a condition for Iran's participation in the 2022 World Cup qualifiers that women be allowed to enter stadiums in Iran. A deadline (July 15, 2019) was set for the fulfilment of this requirement.

On Friday, 01 April 2022, at the group draw for the World Cup in Qatar, Iran was drawn for Group B. If the Islamic Republic of Iran can continue its irregular behaviour towards Iranian women with impunity, the credibility and authority of FIFA and the AFC will also be severely undermined in the eyes of the public.

Therefore, we request that you adhere to the principles of your own constitution and effectively enforce Iran's 2018 pledge so that your credibility and authority as a World Federation is not publicly challenged by Iran's continued disregard for women's rights.

Dr. Behrouz Bayat

Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran

Prof. Dr. Siroos Mirzaei

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