

## AN APPEAL TO SUSPEND ISRAEL FROM PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL SPORTS

29 December 2023

**Addressees:**

*International Olympic Committee Executive Board*

*FIFA Council*

*UEFA Executive Committee*

*FIBA Board*

*FIBA Europe Board*

*...and all other global and European sports governing bodies*

1. Within hours after Russian invasion in Ukraine on 24 Feb 2022, [FIFA](#), [UEFA](#) and [IOC](#) issued their statements of condemnation. Four days later, [FIFA Council](#) and [UEFA Executive Committee](#) issued decisions to suspend all Russian teams, including juniors, from the international football competitions for the actions of their government. UEFA [cancelled](#) its highly lucrative contracts with Russian companies that sponsored it, IOC set up a solidarity fund for Ukraine, while FIFA, UEFA, and many other organisations donated millions to Ukrainian sports. In line with the recommendations from the resolution issued by the [IOC Executive Board](#) on 28 February 2022, [FIBA](#) suspended Russian teams from international basketball. Other sports similarly followed the IOC Executive Board recommendations. South Africa was [banned](#) from sports during the apartheid era, and in 2003, FIFA [suspended](#) Azerbaijan for “unacceptable levels of external pressures”.

2. Following a swift response and an instant suspension of Russia, it is now exceptionally difficult for the sports governing bodies to justify turning a blind eye to Israeli government’s actions. [According to](#) Geneva-based Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor in the period from 7 Oct to 27 Dec, Israeli army killed 26.706 civilians, including 11.422 infants and children and 5822 women in Gaza. The severity of the attack on civilian population, children in particular, illustrated by these numbers alone is sufficient to presume the relevant international laws and standards set in UN Resolutions (such as [2444 \(XXIII\)](#) of 19 December 1968 on respect for human rights and on basic principles for the protection of civilian populations in armed conflicts) have been breached. Gaza has a population of ca. 2.2 million people. For comparison, [in Ukraine](#) with population of ca. 40 million people, about 10.000 civilians were killed during 21 months of war, including ca. 560 children. In Occupied Territory of Gaza, between [66](#) and [90](#) Palestinian journalists were killed, and [they](#) and their [families](#) were deliberately [targeted](#), while [preventing](#) foreign journalists to enter Gaza. In Ukraine, [17 journalists](#) were killed, most of them by Russian forces in 21 months. Between 7 Oct. and 28 Nov., WHO has [documented](#) 427 attacks on healthcare in Gaza and West Bank resulting in 560 fatalities and 718 injured. This is [11 times higher rate](#) of attacks on Ukrainian hospitals by Russian army in 21 months and in a much larger country. Around 253.000 housing units have been damaged or made uninhabitable and 52.000 [destroyed](#) during two months of attack on Gaza’s 365 km<sup>2</sup> territory, amounting to 61% of total housing. At the same time, [humanitarian aid](#) to Occupied Territory of Gaza is grossly [insufficient](#) or is not reaching people at all [due to Israeli blockade](#), while civilians are unable to leave. The Israeli government [does not hide](#) that keeping Gaza’s civilian population deprived of food, water, and basic medical supplies while the diseases rapidly spread, are used as a [weapon of war](#). Most of Gaza’s population is now [starving](#) and living in [inhumane conditions](#).

3. The bombing campaign, ground offensive, and other actions in Gaza Occupied Territory that started on 7 Oct 2023 have violated dozens of international law and international humanitarian law provisions.

#### EXAMPLES OF VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

- a) [Preventing relief supplies](#) and using [starvation](#) as a [weapon of war](#) is explicitly prohibited and considered a war crime under Article 8(2)(b)(xxv) of the [Rome Statute](#) of the ICC, Article 55 of the [Geneva Convention](#) IV, Article 54(1) of the 1977 Additional Protocol I, and Customary Rule [53](#) of international humanitarian law. Secretary General of the UN has [warned](#) the Security Council of the impending humanitarian catastrophe due to Israeli [blockade](#) of humanitarian aid.
- b) Grave breaches of the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), Geneva Convention IV and First [Additional Protocol](#) have been identified. For example, UNICEF has named Israeli attack on Gaza "[war on children](#)" due to the unprecedented number of children being killed (an average of ca. [160 children per day](#)). According to Human Rights Watch, Israel cut off the neonatal unit oxygen supply, forced staff to evacuate, and [left 5 babies to die](#) alone – their decomposed bodies were found during ceasefire. In a separate case, UN confirmed that [six premature infants died](#) in Al Shifa hospital due to the cut in electricity and fuel supply by Israel. It is a war crime under multiple provisions of Article 8 of the [Rome Statute](#) and a crime against humanity under Article 7.
- c) Israel killed more [UN workers](#) in Gaza in two months than in any other war in UN history violating [Convention on the Safety of United Nations Personnel](#).
- d) [Doctors Without Borders](#) reported casualties among their staff in a deliberate attack by Israeli army. Such [attacks](#) against civilian personnel involved in a humanitarian assistance mission in accordance with the UN Charter constitutes a war crime under multiple provisions of Article 8 of the [Rome Statute](#) of the ICC, and a breach of Customary Rules [25, 26, 28, 29 and 30](#) of IHL.
- e) Israel [used white phosphorus](#) in [densely populated areas](#), inflicting deep-burn wounds to the civilian population and causing respiratory difficulties. This is a war crime under Article 8(2)(b)(xvii) and (xviii) of the [Rome Statute](#) of the ICC, a crime against humanity under Article 7, a breach of [Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Incendiary Weapons](#) in civilian areas and Customary Rule [70](#) of international humanitarian law.
- f) Israel bombed [over 200 UN-run schools](#), [local schools](#) and [universities](#), [hospitals](#) (completely disabling most of them and leaving [others](#) only [partly functional](#)), [mills](#), [bakeries](#), [mosques](#), [churches](#), [Convent of Mother Theresa Nuns](#), [Palace of Justice](#), [public libraries](#), [cultural heritage](#), [refugee camps](#), and [people who were evacuating](#) to South Gaza following Israeli army orders. These are crimes against humanity as per [UN experts](#), [war crimes](#) under Art 8 of the Rome Statutes, breaches of International [Covenant](#) on Civil and Political Rights and Customary Rules [7](#) and [9](#) of international humanitarian law. [Gaza zoo](#) was also targeted and animals killed or died of starvation.
- g) On 15 October 2023, just 7 days into the attack on Gaza, 880 scholars and practitioners of international law, conflict studies and genocide studies from all over the world issued a [statement](#) and warned of "a serious risk of genocide". On 28 Oct 2023, the Director of the office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in New York [called](#) Israeli actions in Gaza "a textbook case of genocide". [Jewish Holocaust and Genocide academic](#), Raz Segal, and former [Chief Prosecutor](#) at the International Criminal Court, share the opinion that the actions of Israeli government amount to genocide contrary to both Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and Rome Statute.
  - [Genocidal language](#), which prove intent, was used from the start [at all levels](#) of Israeli government: "There are no innocents in Gaza" (Avigdor Lieberman, [leader of Yisrael Beiteinu](#))

[party](#), Knesset Member, and a former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence); “We are dropping hundreds of tons of bombs on Gaza. The focus is on destruction, not accuracy” (the [Spokesman for Israeli army](#)); “The Children of Gaza have brought this upon themselves” ([Knesset member](#) Merav Ben-Ari). “There will be no electricity, no food, no water, no fuel. [...] We are fighting against human animals, and we are acting accordingly” (Israeli [Minister of Defence](#)); “I am very puzzled by the constant concern which the world is showing for the Palestinian people and is actually showing for these horrible, inhuman animals” ([Representative](#) of Israel to the UN, Dan Gillerman); “We will turn Khan Yunis [South Gaza] into a soccer field [...] We need to take advantage of the destruction we will wreck upon them.” ([Former Israeli Minister of Justice](#) and Minister of Internal Affairs). Israeli [President](#) said the entire nation [of Palestine] is responsible. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [saw](#) Hamas as “Amalek” and referred to the Jewish Holy Bible that regarded all that belongs to “Amalek”, including men, women, children and animals, as eligible for annihilation.

- Genocidal acts are set out in this letter in detail. Under Article 6 of the Rome Statute, genocide is considered the most serious crime in international law and as such falls under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court

- h) Israel has switched off the electricity and water supply in Gaza. UN World Food Programme [says](#) that “hunger is ravaging Gaza” and [famine](#) is spreading fast. Crops and vegetables in Gaza have been deliberately [destroyed](#) by the Israeli army, according to Human Rights Watch. Director General of the WHO [reported](#) that Israeli army has given 24 hours to clear the supplies from the warehouse in South Gaza because they intend to destroy it. Palestinians, children included, are having their limbs amputated [without anaesthetics](#). The conditions required to deliver aid to the people of Gaza [do not exist](#). “Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part” is an act of genocide according to Article 2 (c) of [Convention](#) on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and a breach of Customary Rule [131](#) of international humanitarian law. The deprivation of access to food and medicine is also a crime against humanity called extermination according to Article (7)(1)(b) and 7(2)(b) of the [Rome Statutes](#).
- i) On 13th October, Israel issued a 24-hour notice ordering 1 million people comprising the whole of North Gaza (including 22 hospitals) to evacuate to South Gaza, where it later [bombed](#) them in a more densely populated [area](#) as well as [during evacuation](#). These orders were considered “[outrageous](#)” by Doctors without Borders, “[alarming](#)” by Human Rights Watch, “[death sentence](#) for the sick and injured” by the WHO, “[utterly impossible](#)” by the EU Foreign Policy Chief, and “[extremely dangerous](#)” by the UN Secretary General. Israel later [ordered](#) other areas of Gaza (Khan Yunis) to be evacuated. In December, after the ceasefire, Israel divided Gaza into a chessboard-like [zones](#) and ordered people from some zones in South Gaza to evacuate to another zone, then ordered almost two million to evacuate out of that zone into a barren 8.5 sq. km (3.3 sq. miles) [area](#) without much infrastructure. Gaza residents “are being told to move like human pinballs – ricocheting between ever-smaller slivers of the south, without any of the basics for survival,” Secretary-General Antonio Guterres [told](#) the UN Security Council. 1.84 out of ca. 2.2 million Gazans are already internally [displaced](#). Ethnic cleansing of the [entire](#) occupied Gaza as an ultimate objective of the military offensive was [announced](#) by the Israeli Prime Minister and, according to Israeli magazine [Mekomit](#), also [confirmed](#) by Israeli [Ministry of Intelligence](#). “We are now actually rolling out the Gaza Nakba 2023” said Israel’s [Minister](#) for Agriculture live on Israeli TV. Forced transfer of all or part of the population is a war crime under [Rome Statutes](#) Art 8(2)(b)(viii).

- j) Research by [Israeli journalist](#) into the [use of AI](#) to generate 100 targets a day as opposed to normal 50 targets, along with the [images](#) of whole neighbourhoods destroyed, points at the lack of regard towards civilian life and infrastructure. So far, the amount of explosive [equivalent](#) to two Hiroshima bombs was dropped on Gaza. “Intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities” is a war crime under [Rome Statutes](#) Art 8(2)(b)(i); constitutes use of excessive force and a war crime under part (iv) of the same article; and breaches Customary [Rule 14](#) of IHL.
- k) Israel has announced that it [plans to](#) permanently [annex Gaza](#).
- l) On 6 December 2023, due to the scope of humanitarian crisis, Secretary General of the UN General Assembly [invoked](#) Article 99 of the UN Charter for the first time in his career to warn the Security Council of a threat to international peace and security posed by Israeli actions in Gaza. These actions rank “amongst the worst assaults on any civilian population in our time and age”, [according to](#) Norwegian Refugee Council chief.

4. Israel has no legal recourse to claim the right to self-defence within the meaning of Art. 51 of the UN Charter. According to the [International Court of Justice](#) and the [UN Special Rapporteur](#) the self-defence justification is not available to Israel as an occupying force in Occupied Territories. The act of occupation forfeits the right to claim self-defence. In either case, even where such right exists, it must be exercised according to international humanitarian law norms, and not with complete [impunity](#).

5. EU Foreign Policy Chief [warned](#) Israel that compliance with international humanitarian law and laws of war is imperative, as “not only a moral obligation, but a legal one as well”. In the same thread, he also criticised “the growing violence in the West Bank where, according to the @UN, 271 Palestinians have been killed since 7 October.”

#### **SITUATION IN WEST BANK AND EAST JERUSALEM SINCE 7 OCTOBER 2023**

6. In the Occupied Territories of West Bank and East Jerusalem military incursions have [intensified](#), while murders and abuses of civilians by Israeli army and settlers has massively increased since 7 Oct 2023. [According to](#) UN Human Rights Office, between 7 Oct and 1 Dec 2023, over 3000 Palestinians have been [arrested](#) in the West Bank, many without being presented direct evidence of an offense. Six Palestinians have died in Israeli custody during this period. Israeli forces have injured 3229 Palestinians, including at least 509 children. An additional 80 Palestinians have been injured by settlers. 302 settler attacks against Palestinians were recorded, resulting in Palestinian casualties (33 incidents), damage to Palestinian-owned property (229 incidents), or both (40 incidents). This reflects a daily average of five incidents, compared with three since the beginning of the year. At least 143 Palestinian households comprising 1014 people, including 388 children, have been displaced amid settler violence and access restrictions. The displaced households are from 15 herding Bedouin communities. In addition, 63 Palestinians, including 31 children, have been displaced following punitive demolitions in East Jerusalem and Area C. [271](#) people have been killed, including at least [63 children](#). For example, an [eight-year-old](#) and a [14-year-old](#) were deliberately shot and killed.

7. Israelis [destroyed](#) the statue to a Nobel Prize winner and Palestinian leader (1969-2004) Yasser Arafat and other [cultural](#) symbols. Doctors without Border witnessed Israeli army shooting at the hospital, [killing](#) a boy, and reported being [systematically prevented](#) to reach hospital in West Bank to treat patients, while the injured were denied access to the hospital. Israel engages in [regular bulldozing](#) of the streets in the West Bank to make living a normal life (drive car, call an ambulance, etc.) impossible and force people to relocate. Israeli army [incursions](#) and [settler violence](#) were

recorded all over the West Bank, and the situation is particularly alarming in the [H2](#) Hebron. The hands of a 13-year-old boy, who was a part of hostage exchange during ceasefire, were [fractured](#) by Israelis while beaten in prison eight days prior to his release and he did not receive a treatment until he was handed over to Red Cross. Israel [prohibited](#) expressions of joy for Palestinians to celebrate the return of released relatives from Israeli prisons. Israeli National Security Minister [said](#) that “expressions of joy are a support for terrorism” and that “celebrations of victory give strength to those same human scum.” [Majority](#) of the released people were never charged with any crime and about 2000 of them are held in [administrative detention](#).

### **BREACHES OF INTERNATIONAL LAW BY ISRAEL PRIOR TO 7 OCTOBER 2023**

**8.** “The legacy of Israel’s [56]-year occupation of the Palestinian territories has been systematic human rights violations on a mass scale” [according to](#) Amnesty International. Some of the most flagrant violations of international laws are outlined below.

**9. BOMBING CAMPAIGNS AND 17-YEAR SIEGE OF GAZA:** After [Nakba](#) in [1948](#), in which 750.000 Palestinians were forcefully displaced and dispossessed, and thousands massacred to make way for the newly declared Israeli state, Palestinians fled to surrounding countries and areas of what remained of Palestine. Israel overtook [78%](#) of the Palestinian territory and an area of Gaza became very densely populated. In 1967, Israel occupied Gaza. After two Palestinian uprisings (intifadas) in Gaza, Israel evacuated all its troops and settlers in 2005, and then completely fenced Gaza off from the outside world thus finishing the fence project started in 1996. Since 2007, Israel also imposed a complete sea and air blockade – Gaza is therefore often referred to as the largest [open-air prison](#) in the world. Israel’s closure policy blocks most Gaza residents from travelling and going to the West Bank, the other part of Palestine. Since the Oct 2023 bombing started, the enclave has been completely blocked off. It is the fifth bombing campaign since 2008, i.e., every 16 year old living in Gaza today went through five such campaigns in their lifetime.

**10. OCCUPATION:** Since 1967, after waging a “six-day war” on three neighbouring countries, Israel illegally occupies the territories of [Palestine](#), Lebanon, and Syrian Golan. UN Security Council Resolutions [242](#) and [338](#) directly calling for Israel to cease the occupation and withdraw from the territories acquired by use of force. Israel is acting against these resolutions by continuous occupation and settlement building in the territories that belongs to other countries. It also regularly bombs countries it occupies, murders civilian population, and destroys [cultural heritage](#).

**11. BUILDING SETTLEMENTS ON OCCUPIED LAND:** UN Security Council Resolution [465](#) instructed Israel “to dismantle the existing settlements and in particular to cease, on an urgent basis, the establishment, construction and planning of settlements in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem.” Building settlements in Occupied Palestinian Territories constitutes “a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the vision of two States living side-by-side in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders” according to UN Security Council [Resolution 2334](#) (2016). In [practice](#), not just Israeli Jews but [anyone](#) of Jewish descent (for example, US citizens who have never been to Israel) can arrive to OPT (the right under the Law of Return), automatically receive Israeli citizenship, force Palestinians out of their family homes and move in. Israeli army, and/or settlers, routinely force people out of their homes, [bulldozer houses](#), [olive trees](#), agricultural and other goods that mean livelihood, to clear the way for Israeli settlements. Regular [settler violence](#) with only 6% of reports to police being followed up by Israel, including many



[horrifying accounts](#), are a part of daily life of Palestinians in the West Bank. On 1 March 2023, Israeli Minister of Finance [called](#) for “wiping out” the entire Palestinian village of Huwara in the West Bank.

**12. APARTHEID REGIME:** According to [UN](#) experts, Israeli [B'Tselem](#), [Amnesty International](#), and [Human Rights Watch](#), the state of Israel is implementing “a cruel” [apartheid](#) regime. Apartheid regime of any kind is a crime against humanity under [Rome Statutes](#) Article 7(1)(j), as defined in Article 7(2)(h). It is specifically prohibited under Art 3 of the International [Convention](#) on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and under Apartheid [Convention](#). It also runs counter to the International [Convention](#) against Apartheid in Sports adopted by UN General Assembly Resolution, of which sport governing bodies should take a note. It defines apartheid as “a system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over another racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them[...].” According to Yael Berda of Jerusalem's Hebrew University [\[cited\]](#), the Israeli permit regime is one of three elements underpinning Israel's military management of the occupied population through intelligence, economic control and racial profiling. Israeli scholars Ariella Azoulay and Adir Ophir [\[cited\]](#) have “characterized Israel's control over the West Bank as the interplay between ‘spectacular violence’ that kills instantly and ‘suspended violence’, meaning measures that are not immediately lethal, such as the permit system; the destruction of homes, roads, and well; restrictions on [movement](#); denial of access to water resources; the system of Jewish-only bypass roads; the separation barrier; and other means of dividing Palestinian territory into separate parcels.” Israel [maintains](#) two different systems of law applicable to Jews and Palestinians in OPT: Israeli laws adopted by Israeli Parliament (Knesset) applies to Jewish settlers in OPT while Israeli military law applies to Palestinians. The presence of 645 physical movement [obstacles](#) in the West Bank that have a “severe impact on Palestinians by preventing or restricting access and movement to main roads, urban centres, services, and agricultural areas”. This includes restriction of access to their private farms in West Bank and health care services in other areas of OPT – East Jerusalem. Also, [restrictions](#) on access and movement of labor and goods severely hinder trade outcomes and productive capacity in both West Bank and Gaza. These restrictions [apply](#) exclusively to Palestinian population.

**13. MURDERS, ARRESTS AND TREATMENT OF PALESTINIAN CHILDREN IN OPT:** Israeli media reported that almost [1000](#) Palestinian children as young as 12 are arrested by Israeli army every year, “seized in the dead of night, blindfolded and cuffed, abused and manipulated to confess to crimes they didn't commit.” As [confessed](#) by an ex Israeli soldier, the purpose of many raids on Palestinian homes and arrests of people is to “intimidate everyone everywhere all the time”. Children as young as 5 years old have been [arrested](#). Israel is the only country in the world that [systematically](#) tries children in military courts, but most children are never charged with any crime. They are kept under the [administrative detention](#). When they are charged it is usually for stone throwing, which carries up to 20 years in prison. In 2020, Save the Children UN [reported](#) that Palestinian children are “treated like animals” in Israeli prisons. This is [systematic](#) and includes sexual abuses and torture. Human Rights Watch had extensive [reports](#) highlighting the same issue. A rape of a 13 year old in prison that was reported to Israeli authorities resulted in [raiding](#) the premises of Palestinian branch of the international charity for protection of children that made the report, and declaring them a [terrorist](#) entity.

[Many](#) Palestinian children are killed every year on the streets of West Bank. On 1 June [2-year-old](#) boy and his father were shot by Israeli army as they were leaving their home in Nabi Saleh in occupied West Bank, near the Jewish settlement. The boy [died](#) four days later.

Many children in West Bank must cross Israel military checkpoints on their way to school and sport fields, and are often harassed at those [checkpoints](#).

These actions constitute a breach of many internationally agreed standards and conventions, such as UN Standard Minimum [Rules](#) for the Administration of Juvenile Justice, and the UN [Convention](#) on the Rights of the Child.

**14. THE EXPLOITATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES ON OCCUPIED TERRITORIES:** The UN [reported](#) that “[t]he Palestinian people have been prohibited from exploiting the oil and gas reserves in their own land and water to meet their energy needs and generate fiscal and export revenues.” [Oil and gas sources](#) that lie in Gaza’s territorial waters are exploited by Israel exclusively for its own benefit. The [economic cost](#) of occupation for Palestinian people is enormous and amounts to hundreds of billions in USD. This cost has been studied by UNCTAD at the request of several UN General Assembly [Resolutions](#). The [study](#) highlighted that “[t]his is not only contrary to international law, but also in violation of natural justice and moral law.” Israeli officials have [confirmed](#) on multiple occasions that they “intend to keep the Gazan economy on the brink of collapse without quite pushing it over the edge,” “consistent with avoiding a humanitarian crisis”.

The [access to water](#) for Palestinians is strictly [controlled](#) by Israel. In 1967, Israel placed all water resources in the OPT under its military control under Military [order No.92](#) 1967 applicable only to Palestinians and not to Israeli settlers. Consequences of this were [disastrous](#). At the same time, Palestinians are also forbidden to collect rain for farming on the Occupied Territories because, [according to](#) Israeli government, rain belongs to Israel. Rainwater harvesting cisterns owned by Palestinian communities are therefore often destroyed by the Israeli army. Israeli settlers in the West Bank living just a few hundred meters away face no such restrictions and can enjoy swimming pools and capitalize on well-irrigated farmlands.

UN [Resolution](#) of Nov. 2023 demanded that Israel cease the exploitation, damage, cause of loss or depletion and endangerment of the natural resources in the OPT and in the occupied Syrian Golan, including those perpetrated by Israeli settlers, harming the environment and the dumping of all kinds of waste materials.

## **EFFECTS OF ISRAELI REGIME AND SPORT ASSOCIATIONS’ PRACTICE ON PALESTINIAN SPORTS**

**15.** AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, and given the Russian, South African and other precedents, we strongly urge sports governing bodies to suspend Israel from all global and European sporting events due to the devastating effect the actions of Israeli government and sports associations have on the development of Palestinian sport, as explained below. We call on all global and European sport federations to use their respective sport as a vehicle for peace, justice, fairness, non-discrimination, and development of human rights in sport in line with international law and the obligations stemming directly from their own statutes.

**16.** For example, the fundamental principle of Olympism under [IOC Charter](#) states that “the practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have access to the practice of sport, without discrimination of any kind in respect of internationally recognised human rights.” Another principle adds that “[t]he goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.” According to Rule 1(1) of the IOC Charter, the goal of the Olympic Movement is “to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practised in

accordance with Olympism and its values,” while the mission of the IOC under Rule 2(4) is to place sport “at the service of humanity and thereby to promote peace”.

**17.** According to Article 3 of the [FIFA Statutes](#) “FIFA is committed to respecting all internationally recognised human rights and shall strive to promote the protection of these rights”. Article 4 of the FIFA Statutes prohibits discrimination of any kind and on any grounds against a country or a group of people. Art 4(2) provides that “FIFA remains neutral in matters of politics and religion. Exceptions may be made with regard to matters affected by FIFA’s statutory objectives.” One of these objectives is “to improve the game of football constantly and promote it globally in the light of its unifying, educational, cultural and humanitarian values” (Art 2 FIFA Statutes). In its [Human Rights Policy](#), FIFA has committed itself to respecting human rights in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, all other internationally recognised human rights, and international humanitarian law. This policy sets out standards expected not just of FIFA but also to wide range of connected stakeholders, including its member associations. Therefore, “FIFA seeks to prevent or mitigate adverse human rights impacts that are directly linked to its operations, products or services by its business relationships, even if FIFA has not contributed to those impacts.”

**18.** Under [FIBA General Statutes](#), FIBA’s mission and role under is to “adopt and implement appropriate policies in relation to discrimination”, to “[e]nsure that basketball throughout the world is carried on in a manner that allows the sport to be competitive and fair” and “to foster, encourage and advance the sport and practice of basketball in every country worldwide”.

**19.** While the human rights objectives and commitments in these rulebooks are laudable, their value can only be judged by the extent of their implementation in practice, where powerful political actors frequently seek to muffle legitimate calls for justice in sport. Regarding the rule on political neutrality in sport governing bodies rulebooks, we must point out that, under the circumstances, being passive is not the same as being politically neutral.

Israel’s decades-long occupation, apartheid regime, economic repression, murders and arrests of athletes, and many other illegal actions have prevented the development of sport in OPT. Israeli sports associations have also played their role, as described below. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights recently [said](#) that “[w]e need responsible sport – sport and Mega-Sporting Events that are inclusive, fair, and safe [...]and where human rights risks are mapped and addressed in line with international standards.” Turning a blind eye to the brutal Israeli regime, the actions of the Israeli sport associations, and effect it has on Palestinian athletes and sport is no longer acceptable. The example from football is detailed below, but all sports in OPT suffer from the same issues and human rights violations.

**20. ATHLETES ARE [REGULARLY KILLED, SHOT, AND ARRESTED WITHOUT CHARGE](#).** Young children 9-11 years old who went to play football on the beach in 2014 were targeted by Israeli strike resulting in the [killing](#) of four of the boys and injuring [others](#) (who featured in “Born in Gaza” documentary on Netflix). In Jan 2014, Jawhar Nasser Jawhar (19) and Adam Abd Al Raouf Halabiya (17) were trying to cross a [checkpoint](#) in the West Bank on their way home from a training session. They were [shot](#) repeatedly by soldiers in their feet, mauled by dogs, and then beaten by Israeli soldiers. They can never play football again. In Dec 2008, amid Israeli air raids on the Gaza Strip, [Hazem Alrekhawi](#) (19) and a promising football player with Shabab Rafah, got on a bus with his classmates from college in Gaza City. Israeli fighter jet targeted the bus killing everyone on board – he was an only survivor but carries a life-long injuries. Israeli forces have [shot](#) dead a 23-year-old footballer Ahmed Daraghmeh in Dec 2022. During Israel’s war on Gaza at the end of 2008, 11 Palestinian football players were [killed](#).



A protest [letter](#) signed by 52 professional football players highlighted a bomb attack by Israeli forces on a football stadium in Gaza on November 10 2012, which killed four teenage players. The letter also said that two players from the club Al Amari had been detained in Israel “without charge or trial” since February 2012. Mahmoud Wadi [stated](#) that many players that he played against or with while in Gaza, have died in the current assault, along with Ahmad Awad (21) who represented Palestine’s national football team for dwarfism. Former Palestinian footballer Ahed Zaqqut was [killed](#) by an Israeli missile strike on his home in Gaza. Killing of former players prevents continuity and knowledge transfer to younger generations. According to Palestine’s official Wafa news agency, Israel had [killed](#) at least 47 athletes from various team and individual sports plus 17 technicians and administrators since 7 Oct alone, including Yasmine Sharaf, a six-year-old karate athlete, who had dreamed of representing Palestine in international competitions. Tarek al-Quto was [killed](#) in the violence during second Intifada. Footballer Ibrahim Abuimeir avoided being killed but his home was [destroyed](#) and he no longer has an opportunity to practice.

Between 1967-2006, 20% of total population and 40% of male population in Palestine has been [arrested](#) by Israeli army. Children as young as five have been [arrested](#) on the sports fields. [Mahmoud Sarsak](#), a Palestinian football player and a member of the national team, was arrested and imprisoned by Israel for three years without charge or trial. He went on a hunger strike for three months. His decision to begin a hunger strike was a response to the death of Zakaria Issa, a Palestinian international football player who died shortly after being released due to being denied a treatment for cancer in prison. Negotiations, suggestions, and soft approach did not work to change the situation. “FIFA, UEFA, the world’s players union [FIFPro](#), and some high-profile players, have all had their say on his case, but their combined efforts were unable to prevent a promising footballer being incarcerated for the best years of his career.” Many similar examples of [arrests](#) happen every month. The words “FIFA is committed to helping protect the rights of football players” in FIFA’s [Human Rights Policy](#) sound hollow.

**21. ISRAELI CLUBS AND ATHLETES IN OCCUPIED TERRITORIES:** The Palestine Football Association (PFA) was founded in 1928 and recognised by FIFA in 1929. The PFA was then hijacked and its name changed to “Israel Football Association” (IFA) following the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. PFA was recognised again as a full member of FIFA only in 1998.

Today, seven football clubs from Israeli settlements in OPT are allowed to participate in Israeli leagues. As such, the IFA is in [violation](#) of FIFA and UEFA rules forbidding a club of one national association from playing in the territory of another as the West Bank is covered by the Palestinian Football Association, a FIFA member association. FIFA and UEFA should note the UN Security Council’s confirmation that the West Bank is not part of Israel, and that settlements are illegal. Israeli settlement football clubs contribute to human rights violations. UN Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace (Wilfried Lemke) wrote to FIFA in 2017 to urge a resolution of the matter of the settlement clubs, “in line with the United Nations Security Council Resolutions and FIFA Statutes within a reasonable time frame”. [According to](#) Human Rights Watch “by allowing the [Israeli Football Association] to hold matches inside settlements, FIFA is engaging in business activity that supports Israeli settlements, contrary to the human rights commitments it recently affirmed.” Likewise, UEFA is complicit by allowing IFA national teams and Israeli League clubs, that are a part of European pyramid structure, to participate in its competitions while supporting illegal settlements. It is contrary to both, its own “home and away” rule and the international law. Same goes for all other sports governing bodies that turn the blind eye to this issue and play a part in implementing Israeli settlement policies considered to be in grave violation of international law, including UN Security Council Resolutions. In addition, Palestinians are not allowed to enter settlements in West Bank to watch games played by these clubs – a classic symbol of apartheid regime. 55 Holocaust and

Genocide scholars have signed a [letter](#) and, among other things, called on businesses and labor unions to ensure that they do not aid and abet Israeli mass violence. The EU are about to introduce [sanctions](#) against Jewish settlers responsible for violence against Palestinians, and the State Department of the US government already [imposed](#) travel bans on them. But sport clubs and athletes are still allowed to participate in competitions organised by Israeli associations/leagues who are in turn not sanctioned by the global and European federations. According to FIFA's [Human Rights Policy](#), "FIFA expects and promotes the respect of international human rights standards where land acquisition involves expropriations and in particular where people are resettled in the process." This commitment is not applied in the Palestinian context and instead, both FIFA and UEFA willingly contribute to the violations of international law and human rights.

By comparison, in 2014, when the Russian Football Union tried to field clubs from occupied Crimea in its national league UEFA promptly kicked them out. FIFA actions in Nagorno-Karabakh in the South Caucasus and Northern Cyprus, involved prohibition on an occupying power to field teams from the occupied territory in its national league. Also, "[t]he Russian Olympic Committee [was banned](#) [by IOC] with immediate effect on 12 Oct 2023 for recognising regional organisations from four territories annexed from Ukraine."

**22. DESTROYED SPORT INFRASTRUCTURE, YOUTH PROGRAMMES, AND INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES.** The impact of multiple Israeli wars on Gaza were [detrimental](#) to football clubs: The Israeli blockade and the wars on Gaza "annihilated the private sector projects that used to provide support and aid for clubs going through financial crises". The social, cultural and youth activities that clubs used to organise before the blockade, besides sports activities, had to be abandoned, and clubs have consequently lost their cultural role. During the Israel's war on Gaza at the end of 2008, 55% of the sports infrastructure in Gaza and 15 sports facilities were [destroyed](#), including the headquarters of the Palestinian Olympic Committee and football clubs that fed into the youth programmes in their localities. Wars also [affected](#) the corporations sponsoring clubs and the sport itself. Several factories which had been supporting local tournaments and football clubs for years were destroyed. The company that supported numerous football teams and sponsored countless tournaments in Gaza was forced to shut down after several wars have depleted its capacity to recover. Israel increased restrictions on other economic aspects of life in OPT: it imposed the limits on money transfers into Gaza and this too had impact on sport investment. Israeli bombardment destroyed the [Yarmouk](#) and [Palestine](#) stadiums, the two largest stadiums in Gaza, during the 2012 war. The latest Israeli offense on Gaza has put to an end any chance of recovery of sport that has now been crushed on all levels. In West Bank, apart from shooting and arrests of players, permits needed to build sporting infrastructure by Palestinians on their own land are routinely [denied](#), with 98% overall rejection rate for buildings of any kind in Area C constituting about two thirds of the West Bank. The situation is not much different in [other areas](#) for Palestinians. For Israeli settlers in OPT, no such licensing rules apply, consistent with systematic and institutionalised racial segregation. Israel has blocked Palestinian development by designating large swathes of land as state land, survey land, firing zones, nature reserves and national parks; by allocating land to settlements and their regional councils; or by introducing prohibitions to the specified areas. [Raising](#) the issue of sporting infrastructure permits with Israeli minister Shimon Peres by former FIFA President did not yield any result. In EU [policy](#), sport is seen as a "tool for local and regional development".

**23. TRAVELLING FOR INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC COMPETITIONS IS MADE DIFFICULT:** Palestinian athletes do not have a fair treatment and equal opportunities to [work](#) and travel for competitions in relation to their Israeli counterparts. FiFPro has [emphasised](#) that every football player must be able to play for his country and it is a right of every player to represent their country,

adding that “all professional footballers in the world must have equal rights, including the right to freedom of movement, which is a universal right. That also applies to all professional footballers in and from Palestine.” [According to](#) Human Rights Watch “athletes living in Gaza have missed vital opportunities for advancement not available in Gaza”. They routinely do not hear back after applying for Israeli permits, even though the Israeli army [guidelines](#) specifically identify “entry of sportspeople” as among the permissible exemptions to the closure. Visas for international travel are often denied, while even Cup matches between Palestinian teams in Gaza and West Bank were known to be [delayed](#) or abandoned. As one of many [examples](#), the Palestinian Football Federation applied for permits for the entire 22-person team and 13-person staff, but Israeli authorities, without explanation, granted permits to only 4 people, only one of whom was a player. After appeal to the Jerusalem District Court, Israeli authorities granted 11 people permits, including six players, saying the other 24 were denied on security grounds that were not specified. In 2021, all the football players from Gaza received a permit to travel to West Bank for a Cup match, except for all three of the goalkeepers, which made it pointless to travel. Recently, Jabal al-Mukaber FC based in OPT of East Jerusalem was forced to [withdraw](#) from Asian Football Confederation Cup this year due to the ongoing war. In 2016, the same club was unable to play games in Jerusalem due to restrictions on players with Palestinian identification, preventing them from entering Jerusalem. It is now difficult for the national team to take part in the 2026 football World Cup qualification and the Asian Cup in January 2024 and players are drawn from Palestinians abroad.

Negotiations, suggestions, and soft approach (forming committees to monitor and report, etc.) do not work to change the situation. In 1999 FIFA’s former President [raised](#) these concerns (to allow freedom of movement for athletes and to remove barriers to establishing sport infrastructure) with Israeli minister Shimon Peres, but with no results. Palestinian female national football team struggle with the same restrictions and issues as their male counterparts. Free movement is necessary for development of sport in Palestine, in line with the mandate and objectives of development and promotion of sport by the global and European governing bodies.

In a [resolution](#) suspending Russia, the IOC justified its decision by saying that “the war in Ukraine [...]puts the Olympic Movement in a dilemma. While athletes from Russia [...]would be able to continue to participate in sports events, many athletes from Ukraine are prevented from doing so because of the attack on their country.” The IOC did not specify in which way were Ukrainian athletes prevented from participating and by whom. Athletes could travel through five out of seven European countries that share a border with Ukraine and were not required to join the army. In a more obvious case of travel restrictions placed on athletes from OPT, and constant military attacks on their territories including sports infrastructure, killings and arrests, there is no concern about equality in IOC.

**24. SOME SPORT ASSOCIATIONS/ATHLETES MIGHT NOT WANT TO PLAY AGAINST ISRAEL.** There is a distinct possibility that some football, basketball, handball, and other associations will not want to play against Israel. This would put in jeopardy “the efficient organization and smooth running of the matches”, one of the main points in FIFA’s decision to suspend Russia. The decisions of three associations that did not want to play against Russia are “fully understandable and cannot be criticized from either a legal or moral point of view” [according to](#) FIFA who also took into account the hypothetical future and said it “also is foreseeable that other member associations would take the same position [...]the consequences of which would be irreparable and chaotic”. Many examples of boycott of Israeli athletes have [occurred](#) throughout history and disrupted the proper organisation of competitions. After Oct 2023 and the most severe offensive on Gaza in history, these sentiments run deeper, and the boycotts might take a wider format.

In addition, the boycott might come from some of the 62 State Parties to [International Convention against Apartheid in Sports](#). It provides that the States Parties *shall* prohibit sports contacts with a country practising apartheid and ensure that their sports bodies/ teams, and individual sportsmen do not have such contact. They also have a duty to take all appropriate action to secure the expulsion of a country practising apartheid from international and regional sports bodies and prevent “international sports bodies from imposing financial or other penalties on affiliated bodies which, in accordance with United Nations resolutions, the provisions of the present Convention and the spirit of the Olympic principle, refuse to participate in sports with a country practising apartheid.”

**25. SAFETY AT EVENTS.** Considering strong sentiments on both sides involving global population, the sport organisers cannot ensure safety at their events for anyone, both inside and outside the event venues. Safety concerns were the one of the main reasons used to ban Russia from participation in international sports by IOC, FIFA and UEFA. In its statement recommending suspension of Russia, IOC [said](#) that “[...]for the safety of all the participants, the IOC EB recommends that International Sports Federations and sports event organisers not invite or allow the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes and officials in international competitions.” To justify its decision to ban Russian teams, FIFA [argued](#) before the Court of Arbitration for Sport that “[i]t would be impossible to hold any matches with the [Russian] national team whilst ensuring the safety and security of all participating teams, delegations, and officials.” CAS panel found this reasonable and accepted that “the very presence of the Appellant’s teams might generate protests that escalate into violence.” UEFA agreed and submitted that “[t]he successful staging of the events, including the safety and security, is the paramount factor.” In a separate case, UEFA [added](#) that “[e]ven if matches against Russian teams would be staged on a neutral territory, there are serious concerns about the ability to ensure the safety and security for all those involved, i.e. delegations, players, supporters etc. This is of paramount importance for UEFA.” UEFA [found](#) the Russian’s arguments that matches could be organised on a neutral pitch or without spectators “unconvincing” and said that it is simply impossible to ensure the security of all participants. Playing matches “exposes even the [Russia’s] own players to volatile and potentially dangerous situations”. The security of the opposing teams, officials, and the cities and countries involved should also be taken into account.” All of these arguments apply to Israel’s participation in international competitions. It may be recalled that Paris (where the Olympic games will take place in 2024) has already hosted large demonstrations (much like London and all other major European cities). Many of the same people that took place in the demonstrations all over the world will be present at the Olympics in Paris, at FIFA’s qualifying rounds for FIFA World Cup 2026, EURO 2024, and in UEFA’s European club competitions.

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**26.** The only concrete reason specified in [FIFA’s public statement](#) regarding decision to ban Russia was: “[f]ootball is fully united here and in full solidarity with all the people affected in Ukraine”. Such solidarity was voiced across the sports. Yet, after more than two months of genocide in Gaza, there doesn’t seem to be any such solidarity with Palestinian people. We must ask IOC, FIFA, UEFA, FIBA, and other sports associations – why is this the case? As demonstrated, there is a glaring lack of internal policy coherence regarding decisions in cases of illegal invasion/occupation, and apartheid. Rules that are not applied equally to all are not rules but tools for discrimination susceptible to influence of powerful players in the world politics. This brings into question the business ethics, governance standards, principle of political neutrality and compliance with law and own regulations. Israel government is acting with complete impunity, unconstrained by international politics and law in its decision-making, while its sporting bodies are acting with the same level of impunity in sport. This should not be tolerated by the global and European sports governing bodies whose mandate is

based on a clear set of rules and policy objectives, including principle of non-discrimination between countries and their athletes and teams. Nor it should be accepted by the millions of fans worldwide that the sports federations are unwilling to take genuine and effective action to address such serious issues. The IOC in its [resolution](#) to ban Russia reaffirmed the call of the IOC President: "Give peace a chance." Do Palestinians not deserve the same chance for peace and the same human rights as Ukrainian athletes and teams?

**27.** We implore you to act urgently as required by the severity of the situation. With every passing day, there are life and death consequences for Palestinian sports. Establishing [committees](#) to monitor and report on situation is [not appropriate](#) to address the circumstances and has already proven a failed idea. Nothing short of suspension pending compliance with international law and sports regulations will suffice. **Therefore, we call on IOC and all European and global sports federations to apply their statutory rules on non-discrimination and human rights and ban Israel from their respective sports. The head-in-the-sand approach and double standards are no longer acceptable.**