

November 10, 2022

Attention:

AFC President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC General Secretary Datuk Seri Windsor John
AFC House
Jalan 1/155B, Bukit Jalil
57000 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia

Dear AFC President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa and AFC General Secretary Datuk Seri Windsor John,

We write to you concerning the double standard taken by FIFA in regard to the Israeli Football Association.

Footballers around the world are excited as the 2022 World Cup in Qatar approaches.

Congratulations to the Asian Football Confederation for hosting this event in one of its member countries.

Certainly, there is much excitement among the Asian and Arab football associations, and the footballers in the continent and in the Arab region that this is the first time the World Cup has been hosted by an Arab country.

The support for wearing Palestine arm bands among Arab teams is commended, and we ask the AFC and its members to support this. We hope that keffiyehs and Palestine flags can show the strong support for ending the double standards for the PFA, and for insisting FIFA and the UEFA hold the IFA accountable for its violations of the FIFA and UEFA statutes.

Israeli Football Association (IFA) is in Violation of FIFA Statutes

As you know, for many years, the IFA has been in **serious breach of FIFA's own statutes as they relate to human rights, anti-discrimination, and equality for the promotion of football in a globally accessible and unifying manner.**

FIFA has failed repeatedly for many years to address the Palestinian Football Association's (PFA) documented complaints.

What took hours and days in the case of support for the Ukraine, lingers after decades without action in regard to support for Palestinian football.

It is now the time for the AFC to take the lead given the Palestinian Football Association (PFA) is one of your members.

IFA was kicked out of AFC for its violations related to human rights, anti-discrimination, and inequality, and still the UEFA and FIFA has tolerated these violations for three decades.

This situation warrants the severest sanctions against IFA now. IFA did not learn the lesson because it feels it's above the law and therefore is emboldened to continue its racism and breach of the rules with impunity. Allowing IFA to sport wash an apartheid state is a stain and embarrassment to all who care about the sport of football.

As a FIFA Senior Vice-President since 2018 we would ask you to speak out and act with integrity.

AFC Objectives and Obligations

In AFC Statutes (2020), Article 2 Objectives under point (h) indicates to protect the interest of Member Association. Thus, we call on you to protect and stand with the PFA.

Article 9 (1) (f) indicates that PFA as a member will "benefit from the rights and privileges granted to them by these Statutes and applicable Regulations." We ask you to ensure the PFA in fact benefits from these rights and privileges through

your engagement to call on FIFA to hold the IFA accountable. In particular, in support of Article 3 (1) which indicates under Fundamental Principles that the AFC “is committed to respecting all internationally recognized human rights and strives to promote the protection of those rights.”

FIFA Statutes and Objectives

In Section 3, the FIFA Statutes indicate a commitment to Human Rights:

FIFA is committed to respecting all internationally recognised human rights and shall strive to promote the protection of these rights.” In the impunity provided to Israel in regard to violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, FIFA has breached this commitment.

And, Section 2 of the FIFA Statutes include the following objectives:

- a) to improve the game of football constantly and promote it globally in the light of its unifying, educational, cultural and humanitarian values, particularly through youth and development programmes;
- e) to use its efforts to ensure that the game of football is available to and resourced for all who wish to participate, regardless of gender or age;

AFC, as a Confederation under FIFA, is bound by both its statutes and those of FIFA has the moral and legal obligation to uphold both the AFC’s and FIFA’s statutes.

Brutal Occupation and Apartheid Breach FIFA Statutes

The State of Israel’s brutal occupation makes the realization of the objectives of FIFA impossible, as Israel continues to systematically practice ethnic cleansing and segregation against more than five million Palestinians suffering under its military occupation.

Palestinian clubs continue to be deprived of growing and developing the game they love due to the Israeli occupation that kills and arrests their players, destroys their facilities, and confiscates their land to build illegal settlements. Earlier this year, the Al-Khader club lost two promising players who were killed in cold blood by the occupation. 15-year-old player Zeid Mohammad Ghneim and his distant cousin Mohammad Al-Ghneim were executed by Israeli soldiers.

Palestinian players cannot freely enter, exit, or travel within their homeland due to travel restrictions and Israeli checkpoints; their stadiums are often stormed by Israeli soldiers who throw tear gas canisters as well as shoot live and rubber bullets during the matches.

Non-Discrimination, Equality and Neutrality

Section 5 of the FIFA Statutes is also very clear in regard to non-discrimination, equality, and neutrality, specifically:

1. **Discrimination of any kind** against a country, private person or group of people on account of race, skin colour, ethnic, national or social origin, gender, disability, language, religion, political opinion or any other opinion, wealth, birth or any other status, sexual orientation or any other reason is strictly prohibited and punishable by suspension or expulsion.
2. FIFA remains neutral in matters of politics and religion. Exceptions may be made with regard to matters affected by FIFA's statutory objectives.

When it came to South African apartheid, the prevalence of discrimination and inequality led to South Africa being thrown out of FIFA. It was not acceptable in the case of South Africa to say "apartheid" was a political issue, nor is it in the case of Israel. Reports from [B'Tselem](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [Amnesty International](#) have all been very clear that Israel is practicing apartheid across the occupied area and within Israel.

Racism, Threats and Violence by Israel Football

Well documented and internally reported discrimination, accompanied by violence, threats, and anti-Arab bigotry, regarding the Beitar Jerusalem team have been ignored by FIFA and the UEFA. For example, in October 2020 The Washington Post indicated:

La Familia, is composed of infamously racist “ultras” who support the team Beitar Jerusalem. On their face, ultras are highly organized fans; at games, they lead raucous chants, unfurl massive banners and set off flares. In practice, they can operate as members of a street gang united by criminality, ideology or a little bit of both.

Beitar is the unofficial team of Israel’s political right. It is the only club in the Israeli Premier League never to have had an Arab player on its roster, and it is Netanyahu’s favorite team. So as the summer’s protests swept Jerusalem, Likud activist Amnon Ben Ami put the call out for the ultras on his popular Facebook page: “La Familia, you are the medicine against those anarchists.”

Ben-Gurion University doctoral student Sophia Solomon concluded that the group’s violence benefits both the team and the politicians. Despite the fact that such widely reported specifics about racism, discrimination, racist chants (including “Death to Arabs”), and violence have been brought to the attention of FIFA, the organization continues to turn a blind eye.

AFC and FIFA Statutes exclude Racism

Yet AFC to its embarrassment ignores Article 2 of its own Statute that calls for “strong measures and campaigns against...racism in Football.”

In Section 5 of the FIFA Statutes, as a commitment to promoting friendly relations, FIFA indicates that it

shall provide the necessary institutional means to resolve any dispute that may arise between or among member associations, confederations, clubs, officials and players.

The AFC needs to ensure its own house is in order, and take steps to call FIFA to sanction the IFA.

Double Standards and Hypocrisy

Clearly, FIFA appear to have “dropped the ball” and not taken any meaningful action to hold the Israel Football Association accountable.

Yet within hours action is underway in regard to Russia, and with a couple of days sanctions are put in place, and with several months a comprehensive list of detailed sanctions relating to all aspects of Russian football including youth and women, with ramifications extending for more than a decade with indication these conditions may be further increased.

Why the double standards? Why the hypocrisy? Why the lack of accountability in regard to Israel? We ask you specifically: what has the AFC done in this regard?

Action is required now

Indication that any issues related to the FIFA stance that IFA’s behaviour is political, if ever valid, was negated when FIFA and the UEFA on February 28, 2022 suspended Russia from international competition. This double standard reeks of hypocrisy.

The FIFA statutes related to member associations (Section 15) requires that member associations “must comply with the principles of good governance and shall in particular contain, at a minimum, provisions relating to the ‘following matters.’ In the case of the PFA, the Israeli military occupation means that, of these matters, the following cannot be realized:

b) to prohibit all forms of discrimination.

e) all relevant stakeholders must agree to respect the Laws of the Game, the principles of loyalty, integrity, sportsmanship and fair play as well as the

Statutes, regulations and decisions of FIFA and of the respective confederation;

i) to avoid conflicts of interests in decision-making.

Article 3 (3) of the AFC statutes indicates that “Discrimination of any kind against a country, private person or group of people on account of race, skin colour, ethnic, national or social origin, gender, disability, language, age, physical appearance, religion, political opinion or any other opinion, wealth, birth or any other status, sexual orientation or any other reason is strictly prohibited and punishable by suspension or expulsion.”

The Palestinian Football Association has long waited for Israeli footballers to condemn these actions.

But, instead of denouncing the actions of its government, or at least protesting the violence, the Israel Football Association **is allowing more than six clubs, located on lands stolen from the Palestinian people, to play in its national league, while Palestinians are denied access to these same lands; it allows the racist fans of Israeli clubs like “Beitar Jerusalem” to chant racist and derogatory chants against Palestinians and attack them in the streets.**

Football has a powerful role in building a culture of tolerance and respect and in promoting friendly relations among nations as indicated in FIFA’s own objectives. As a member of AFC, the Palestinian Football Association deserves to have the AFC and its member organizations full support in requiring FIFA to suspend the IFA until there is compliance.

Civil Society is Speaking Out

A webinar with Jonathan Kuttub, Gonzalo Boye, Roger Waters and Rizek Salah was held to discuss the ways in which Israel has violated the principles of FIFA that normally would warrant disciplinary actions and even suspension of its membership. The webinar is also available in Spanish and Arabic.

It is clear the world is watching closely and is calling AFC to take a principled stance that will address its ignorance of these serious violations by IFA that have been brought to your attention for at least a decade.

Call to FIFA

It is in this context that civil society from around the world come together in June 2022 to make a strong but simple call for FIFA to sanction the IFA. In this regard more than dozens of organizations and thousands of individuals from around the world have come together to send FIFA the following message:

Both Israel and Palestine are members of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) and subject to its internal regulations.

Israel has violated the principles of FIFA in a variety of ways that would normally warrant disciplinary actions and even a suspension of its membership. However, the politics of FIFA have prevented the organization in the past from taking such action. Its internal by-laws have even been amended to make it more difficult for the Palestine Football Association (PFA) to demand such action.

In the past, it has also been the policy of FIFA to punish any raising of Palestinian flags by players and clubs who are not Palestinian, on the basis that “politics and sports should not mix.” The Palestine Football Association (PFA) fought a legal battle for years with integrity and had their case illegally shut down; however, FIFA did not even bother following the legal process in their suspension of Russia. The hypocrisy and double standards are unacceptable. Palestinians have been treated unjustly.

Our objections include:

A. The IFA (Israel Football Association) allows players and even five clubs from the illegal Israeli settlements (legally under the jurisdiction of Palestine), to play in their national league without first obtaining permission from the PFA. This is a straightforward violation of FIFA regulations that must be addressed.

B. Israel, by means of its military administration and control of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, has taken a number of measures that harm the sport of football, including:

- *International travel restrictions on Palestinian players and coaches*
- *Restricting the movement of football players between Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem*
- *Refusal to allow the building of stadiums and facilities in Area C of the West Bank, the only viable location for such facilities*
- *Failing to release Palestinian sports equipment from Israeli customs, as Israel controls all borders*
- *Administrative arrests of footballers and attacks upon, including the tear-gassing of, sports events*

C. Finally, we object to the prevalence of blatantly racist sloganeering (“Death to Arabs”) and anti-Arab violence associated with IFA games. This runs counter to FIFA’s stated goal of confronting racism.

The ask is simple:

FIFA must sanction the Israel Football Association until the above objections have been resolved.

FIFA, as the umbrella organization for the sport of football in its entirety and its highest governing body, needs to carry out its legal and moral obligations.

The list of signatories includes human rights, faith groups, sports organizations and clubs, grassroots organizations, and others from six continents.

It includes musician Roger Waters, author Yann Martel, journalist Chris Hedges, musician Lelia Sansour, award filmmaker Rifat Audeh, chair of the Jewish Network for Palestine in the UK, David Cannon, along with faith leaders, lawyers, doctors, academics, artists, athletes, fans, labour leaders, activists, and fans from Palestine, Israel, the USA, Canada, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Greece, the UK, Germany, Australia, Jordan and many other places.

Those who have signed can be found at:

<https://www.justpeaceadvocates.ca/breach-of-fifas-own-statues-as-they-relate-to-human-rights-anti-discrimination-and-equality/>

The statement is also available in Arabic, Spanish and French as well as the enclosed English.

Action is needed

FIFA has to date not responded. We hope for more from the UEFA, the confederation in which the IFA plays but they too have not responded.

Several thousand letters have been sent to both FIFA and to the UEFA.

I write to you as an international human rights lawyer, who practices in Israel, the USA and Palestine, as well as the cofounder of the premier human rights organization Al-Haq, and currently as the executive director of the Friends of Sabeel North America. This letter follows the dozens of organizations that have joined this call to FIFA and now are insisting the IFA be held accountable to both the FIFA and UEFA statutes, and that the AFC speak out in support of immediate action, and the end of double standards in this regard.


Please use this opportunity of the first Arab country hosting the World Cup to shine a light on ending the racism and apartheid that the IFA has practiced.

I look forward to your response which can be sent to:

Jonathan Kuttab
Friends of Sabeel North America
PO Box 3192
Greenwood Village, CO, 80155-3192
jonathankuttab@fosna.org

We would also welcome a meeting with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Kuttab". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jonathan Kuttab, Esq.
Executive Director
Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA)

cc: AFC Executive, FIFA Council-AFC Members, AFC Member Associations

Organizations that have endorsed the call for holding IFA accountable:

#Africa4Palestine, South Africa
Academics for Palestine-Concordia, Montreal, Canada
Al Marwa, Jordan
Al-Haq
Americans Committed to Justice and Truth (Oregon)
Australian Friends of Palestine Association, Adelaide, Australia
Australians for Palestine, Australia
Baltimore Nonviolence Center
Bashir Zmaili & Partners Co., Jordan
Bathurst United Church, Toronto
BDS Malaysia, Malaysia
Boycott from Within, Palestine 48 territory ("Israel")
Cafe Palestina, Berkshires, Massachusetts
Canada Palestine Association, Vancouver, Canada
Canadian Arab Federation
Canadian Arab Society Of London
Canadian BDS Coalition
Canadian Council of Muslim Women Montreal
Canadian Foreign Policy Institute
Canadian Women's Declaration
Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME)
Christian-Jewish Allies for a Just Peace for Israel/Palestine
Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid, Victoria, B.C., Canada
COASAP, IA, USA
Comité de Solidaridad con la Causa Árabe (CSCA)
Coordinación por Palestina Uruguay
Dufferin Simcoe Film Society, Shelburne, Ontario, Canada
Edmonton Small Press Association
Episcopal Peace Fellowship - Palestine Israel Network, USA
FOSNA Pittsburgh
Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA)
Gaza Action Ireland , Ireland
Global Peace Alliance BC Society, Canada
Good Shepherd Collective, Palestine
Greater Toronto for BDS (GT4BDS), Toronto

Green Mountain Solidarity With Palestine, Waitsfield, VT
Haiti Action Committee
Hamilton Coalition to Stop the War, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
Hettin Camp Club, Jordan
Holy Land Trust
HR4A Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada
Independent Jewish Voices, Canada
Indiana Center for Middle East Peace, Indiana, USA
Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church USA
Jewish Voice for Peace, USA
Jews for Palestinian Right of Return, USA
Just Peace Advocates/Mouvement Pour Une Paix Juste, Canada
Just Peace Committee & ILPS Commission 4, Vancouver, BC
Kairos Palestine
Kairos Sabeel Netherlands
Kairos USA
Knowledge Track Inc., Ottawa, Canada
Kumi NOW
Labor for Palestine, USA
LAMP (Local Alliance for Mideast Peace, Knoxville, Tenn, USA
Let Kashmir Decide
Local Alliance for Mideast Peace (LAMP), Knoxville, Tennessee
Middle East Justice and Peace Group of South Central PA, Gettysburg,
Pennsylvania
Nawal al Abed, USA
NH Veterans for Peace, New Hampshire, USA
Niagara Movement for Justice in Palestine-Israel (NMJPI), Ontario, Canada
NonViolence International
Northfielders for Justice in Palestine/Israel, Northfield MN USA
Oakville Palestinian Rights Association, Oakville, Ontario, Canada
PAJU (Palestinian and Jewish Unity), Montreal, Canada
Palestine Football Association
Palestine Higher Council of Youth & Sports
Palestine House -The Palestinian Canadian Community Centre, Mississauga,
Ontario
Palestine Olympic Committee
Palestine Solidarity Campaign - Cape Town, South Africa

Palestinian Canadian Congress Canada National
Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace, Wooster, Ohio
Regina Peace Council, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada
RootsAction.org , United States
Sabeel
Salmon Arm Ecumenical KAIROS committee (British Columbia)
Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network
SE London Friends of Palestine
Students for Justice in Palestine at Rutgers - New Brunswick
Sveriges Kommunistiska Ungdomsförbund (Communist Youth of Sweden)
Tadamun Antimili, Colombia
The Rosette Network Ltd., Ottawa, Canada
Toronto Raging Grannies Toronto, Ontario, Canada
U.S. Palestinian Community Network (USPCN)
UbiOrbi Denavar
UCC PIN National Steering Committee, USA
USACBI: US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, USA
Valley View Church, Pittsburgh, PA USA
Veteran for Peace, Pittsburgh