

Threats to Athletes, Human Rights Crimes Define Beijing Games

Sponsors, NBC Should Stand with Athletes and Against Repression

(Washington DC, February 2, 2022) – A coalition of athletes and human rights groups is calling on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and The Olympic Partner (TOP) Olympic sponsors to ensure athletes' free expression is guaranteed during the Beijing Winter Games. The 2022 Beijing Games officially launch on February 4 against a backdrop of Chinese government atrocity crimes targeting Uyghur Muslims and other Turkic communities, and harsh repression in Tibet, Hong Kong, and on the mainland.

“Sponsors of the Beijing 2022 Winter Games cannot pretend that these Olympics are business as usual,” said **Rob Koehler, director of Global Athlete, an athletes' rights advocacy group.** “Corporate sponsors say that their sponsorship is to support the athletes. Meanwhile athletes are heading into a hazardous working environment in China, with few protections for free speech and no rights to protest crimes against humanity as they may want to do. Sponsors have the responsibility to insist on games hosts that uphold—not trample—human rights.”

Recent [remarks](#) by a high-ranking Beijing Organizing Committee member are a thinly veiled threat targeting athletes who could speak out about such abuses: “Any behavior or speech that is against the Olympic spirit, especially against the Chinese laws and regulations, are also subject to certain punishment.”

“It's very troubling that the IOC has been so willing to get in line with the Chinese government's own approach to silencing critics,” said **Uyghur Human Rights Project Executive Director, Omer Kanat.**

The IOC has [committed](#) to allow athlete expression during the Olympic Games, including during press conferences and through social and traditional media, but [IOC Guidelines](#) state that protest or demonstration must “comply with local legislation.” The IOC has an obligation to uphold speech rights of Olympic athletes and ensure that none are subject to reprisals for exercising those rights.

“Athletes should not have to be scared for their safety when they go to China,” said **Noah Hoffman, two-time Olympian skier and board member of Global Athlete.** “It is completely unacceptable that athletes have to censor themselves on human rights and other topics—in order to keep from being censored or sent home by the Chinese government, the Olympic host.”

“Olympics stakeholders must uphold human rights during the Games, which includes athletes' freedom of speech,” said **Zumretay Arkin, Program & Advocacy Manager at the World Uyghur Congress.** “Athletes who want to show solidarity with Uyghurs, Tibetans and Hong Kongers should be applauded, not punished.”

“Athletes are already at risk of being used as propaganda during China's Olympics, and now they risk losing their freedom of speech and protest as well,” said **Pema Doma, Campaigns Director for Students for a Free Tibet.**

“The IOC’s integrity and indeed its legitimacy as an international organization will be tested by its reaction to such threats,” said **Bennett Freeman, member of the Steering Committee of the Coalition to End Uyghur Forced Labor and former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.**

Gold medal Olympic skier [Mikaela Shiffrin has said](#) she should not have to choose between her “morals” and her “job” to compete in China. Basketball player [Enes Kanter spoke out](#) about repression of religious and other freedoms in Tibet. Two-time Olympic cross-country skier and former Team USA athlete Noah Hoffman said of his former teammates, “I am scared for their safety when they go to China.”

“The Olympic Partner” sponsors including [Coca-Cola](#), [Samsung](#), and [Airbnb](#) regularly [profess their support](#) for them. However, to demonstrate meaningful support, sponsors must be prepared to push back on the Beijing organizers’ threats, and back athletes if they are subject to reprisals or intimidation. The failure to support athletes in such circumstances makes the sponsors—along with the IOC—complicit with the Beijing Organizing Committee and the Chinese government in human rights abuses.

Finally, NBC Universal—the exclusive broadcaster of the Beijing Games in the United States—must ensure that any athlete protests related to the human rights situation in China are free from censorship. NBC’s journalistic integrity will be judged by audiences and advertisers watching to ensure that it fully covers the repressive human rights climate in China, and does not participate in promoting propaganda from the Chinese government.

“Freedom of expression is an important human right under international law, but Chinese human rights defenders are routinely put in prison for merely expressing their views. The IOC and governments must be ready to protect athletes who could become victims of the Chinese government's retaliation,” said **William Nee, Research and Advocacy Coordinator at Chinese Human Rights Defenders.**

Signed:

Alberta Uyghur Association
Amigos del Tíbet - Colombia
AREF international Onlus
Army of Survivors
Asociación Cultural Tibetano-Costarricense
Association France Tibet
Athlete Ally
Australia Tibet Council
Australian East Turkestan Association
Australian Uyghur Association
Australian Uyghur Tangritagh Women’s Association
Austria Uyghur Association
Baltic Tibet group
Bath District Tibet Support Group

Bay Area Friends of Tibet
Belgium Uyghur Association
Blue Crescent Humanitarian Aid Association
Campaign for Uyghurs
ChinaAid
Chinese Human Rights Defenders
Citizen Power Initiatives for China – 公民力量
Dutch Uyghur Human Rights Foundation
East Turkistan Association in Finland
East Turkistan Association of Canada
East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Association
East Turkistan Entrepreneur Tradesmen and Industrialists Businessmen Association
East Turkistan Human Rights Watch
East Turkistan New Generation Movement
East Turkistan Nuzugum Culture and Family Association
East Turkestan Press and Media Association
East Turkistan Sports and Development Association
East Turkistan Union in Europe
East Turkestan Union of Muslim Scholars
Eastern Turkistan Foundation
Étudiant pour Tibet Libre
Equality League
European East Turkistan Education Association
Finnish Uyghur Culture Center
Free Indo-Pacific Alliance
Free Tibet
Free Tibet Fukuoka
Freedom House
Friends of Tibet Bulgaria
Fundación Casa del Tibet
Global Alliance for Tibet & Persecuted Minorities
Global Athlete
Grupo de Apoio ao Tibete-Portugal
Hong Kong Democracy Council
Hong Kong Committee in Norway
Ilham Tohti Initiative
Indonesia Save Uyghur
International Campaign for Tibet
International Pen Uyghur Center
International Society for Human Rights
International Support for Uyghurs
International Tibet Network
International Union of East Turkistan Organizations
International Uyghur Human Right and Democracy Foundation
Isa Yusup Alptekin Foundation
Islamic Community Milli Gorus

ISHR - Sweden
Japan Uyghur Association
Jewish Movement for Uyghur Freedom
Latvia for Tibet
Norwegian Uyghur Committee
NY4HK
Omer Uygur Foundation
Pema Choden
Power of Sport Lab / Athletes for Human Rights
Santa Barbara Friends of Tibet
Satuq Bugrakhan Foundation of Science and Civilization
Society for Threatened Peoples
Society Union of Uyghur National Association
South Mongolia Congress
Stop Uyghur Genocide Canada
Stand With Hong Kong Vienna
Students for a Free Tibet
Students for a Free Tibet -Denmark
Sweden Uyghur Education Union
Swedish Tibet Committee
Swiss Tibetan Friendship Association
Switzerland East Turkestan Association
Taiwan East Turkestan Association
The Campaign for Hong Kong
The Norwegian Tibet Committee
The Tibet Support Committee, Denmark
Tibet Initiative Deutschland
Tibet Justice Center
Tibet Mx
Tibet Rescue Initiative in Africa
Tibet Solidarity
Tibet Support Groep Nederland
Tibetan Community Switzerland and Liechtenstein
Tibetan Community of Australia
Tibetan Community in Britain
Tibetan Youth Association in Europe
Den norske Tibet-komiteé
US Tibet Committee
Uigur Society of the Kyrgyz Republic
Umer Uyghur Trust
USTC
Uyghur American Association
Uyghur Academy Australia
Uyghur Academy Canada
Uyghur Academy Europe
Uyghur Academy Foundation

Uyghur Academy Japan
Uyghur Academy USA
Uyghur Association of Victoria
Uyghur Center for Human Rights and Democracy
Uyghur Cultural and Education Union in Germany
Uyghur Education Union
Uyghur Human Rights Project
Uyghur Projects Foundation
Uyghur Refugee Relief Fund
Uyghur Research Institute
Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project
Uyghur Science and Civilization Research Foundation
Uyghur Support Group Netherlands
Uyghur Transitional Justice Database
Uyghur U.K. Association
Uyghur Youth Union in Kazakhstan
Uzbekistan Uyghur Culture Center
Vancouver Society in Support of Democratic Movement
Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation
Victoria Uyghur Association
Voces de Tíbet
We The Hongkongers
World Uyghur Congress
World Uyghur Congress Foundation

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