

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 13, 2024

## VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Thomas Bach  
President  
International Olympic Committee

Dear President Bach:

I write to join the chorus of exiled Iranian athletes requesting that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) ban Iran from formally participating in the 2024 Olympic Games. As the eyes of the world turn toward Paris in anticipation of the Games, the IOC must immediately sanction Iran and send a resolute message: abuse of athletes and violation of the Olympic Charter will not be tolerated.

Iran is governed by an evil regime that systematically victimizes its own citizens, particularly women and girls. Violence permeates every aspect of life for Iranian women. While the horrific murder of Mahsa Amini—the 22-year-old young woman killed by the Iranian morality police simply for refusing to wear a head covering—was a prominent example of this systemic violence, countless Iranians face these human rights abuses every day.

Athletes are not immune from persecution in Iran. In fact, Iran has only one female Olympic medalist, Kimia Alizadeh. This disparity is not due to a lack of talent. Rather, it is a direct result of the oppression and abuse female athletes in Iran face—the very oppression and abuse that forced Alizadeh to later defect.<sup>1</sup> Wearing the hijab is forced in sports, and Iranian women are banned from participating in sports central to the summer Games, like gymnastics, swimming, wrestling, and boxing.

Worse yet are the examples of athletes who have been harmed, imprisoned, or murdered simply for speaking out against the Regime's injustices. Marjan Jangjou, a rock climber, has been missing since she was arrested in her home in 2022 for her alleged participation in street protests. Navid Afkari, a wrestler, was executed, even after international outcry, for insulting the Ayatollah. Mohammad Karami, a national karate champion, was hanged following a sham hearing on his alleged involvement in the death of a paramilitary member. Kowsar Khoshnoudi-Kia, a silver-medalist archer, lost her sight after being shot by Islamic Republic forces.<sup>2</sup> There are dozens more known Iranian athletes who have been abused or murdered by the Iranian Regime.

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<sup>1</sup> Megan Specia, *Iran's Only Female Olympic Medalist Defects Over 'Lies' and 'Injustice'*, N.Y. TIMES (July 25, 2021) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/13/world/middleeast/kimia-alizadeh-iran-defection.html/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Iranian Athletes Killed, Tortured, Sentenced to Death for Supporting Protests*, CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN (Jan. 4, 2021) <https://iranhumanrights.org/2023/01/iranian-athletes-killed-tortured-sentenced-to-death-for-supporting-protests-1/>.

For centuries, sports have empowered the powerless and catalyzed change. Indeed, the Olympics bring the world together and place sport at the service of humankind. According to the Olympic Charter, “the practice of sport is a human right.” The Olympic Charter also makes clear that the goal of the Olympics is to “promote a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.”<sup>3</sup> In direct violation of this charter, the Iranian Regime routinely prevents women from participating in sports, and they even murder and arrest those who do not conform to their standards. Similarly, Iran has no interest in promoting a peaceful society, as they proudly remain the world’s largest state sponsor of terrorism and are currently funding attacks on U.S. troops abroad and on Israel, our greatest ally in the Middle East.

The Regime should not gain any glory from the Games until they meet the standards and ideals of Olympism by allowing all Iranian athletes—regardless of gender or political persuasion—to practice their sport freely and without persecution. I ask that the Iranian Regime be held accountable for its crimes, and I request an update from the IOC on the status of Iran’s participation in the 2024 Olympic Games.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn  
United States Senator

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<sup>3</sup> Olympic Charter pmbl. ¶ 4, 2.