



STATEMENT REGARDING THE DECISION OF POLISH FOOTBALLERS TO BOYCOT THE RUSSIAN NATIONAL TEAM

28.02.2022

The Section for Human Rights in Sport at the Polish Institute of Business and Human Rights expresses its support and appreciation for the decision of the Polish footballers and the Polish Football Association to boycott the representation of Russia in light of the ongoing aggression of the Russian Federation on Ukraine.

One of the sport's most fundamental principles is the principle of autonomy and political neutrality of sport. This principle is deeply justified. However, the sport community members' protest against brutal violation of human rights and values underpinning the international legal order is not a matter of politics. It is an issue of basic human decency and universal principles of law. In the current circumstances the Polish national team's protest is all the more justified and needed, because the Russian president has been violating the autonomy of sport and using sport to ramp up his image and personal popularity to strengthen his political power, which he is now so outrageously abusing.

This statement is by no means meant to condemn all Russian athletes. To the contrary, we solidarize and convey respect to those of them, who oppose war in accordance with the basic principles of human dignity and fair play underpinning the world of sport, despite the grim consequences which they face from their government because of that. We understand those who are not prepared to take this risk due to how sport and social life in general are organized in their country. But we condemn those athletes who voluntarily and intentionally lend their popularity to politicians who disregard human rights and the international rule of law. Especially today, when the true character of these politicians became so clear.

We call upon all sport governing bodies to support all athletes who chose to demonstrate the same stance as the Polish footballers did. We recall that according to the Universal Declaration of Player Rights "every sport must recognise that the player is, first, a human person and, then, an athlete". It is every athlete's human right to refuse to compete with the representatives of Russia in the current circumstances. Attempts to pressure such athletes into changing their minds by threats of any negative consequences, would violate their human rights.

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