

**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 30/09/2022 / 09:00 (CEST)**

*This open letter was communicated to FIFA President on 29/09/2022.*

*Strictly confidential until the embargo is released.*

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*Open stadiums,  
Iranian women movement for equal  
access in sport.  
@openstadiums*

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**OPEN LETTER TO GIANNI INFANTINO,**  
29/09/2022

**PRESIDENT OF FIFA**

Dear Mr. Infantino,

We are writing to you today on behalf of the Iranian campaign Open Stadiums.

For over four decades, Iranian women have been denied their most basic liberties. We have been banned from enjoying sports, watching games in stadiums, and cheering for our favourite football teams.

Open Stadiums campaign have become the recognised face of the Iranian women's movement. We rise up together to allow Iranian women enjoy watching sport, specifically following football where and when they want.

For years, together with football supporters and human rights organizations all over the world, we have called on FIFA and you, personally, Mr. Infantino, to act, as Iran still denies the right of every woman who wants to attend football games in a stadium.

You repeatedly made a public commitment that FIFA would solve this gross human rights violation, but we have, sadly, come to the conclusion that these were all empty words and promises. Nothing has changed – Iranian women remain locked out of our "Beautiful Game" and we are systematically repressed when we try to enter stadiums in Iran.

In March 2022, women who were told they could watch a FIFA World Cup 2022 qualifying match between Iran and Lebanon in Mashhad were tear-gassed and pepper-sprayed by police forces. The entire world witnessed these shameful scenes. When the Islamic Republic pretended to open league matches for women, it was far from the equality FIFA's own statutes require. To begin with, very few women could buy tickets, then in a humiliating way got physically harassed by Iran's morality police before they could even enter Azadi stadium, which to this day is the only stadium in the country where women have been allowed to watch men's football matches at all.

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And all this was happening, Mr. Infantino, under your watch and, seemingly, with FIFA's protection and approval, judging by your organization's inaction.

Because of this continuing discrimination, Iranian women trust neither the Islamic Republic's authorities nor the Iranian Football Federation that the Azadi stadium will remain open to them after the FIFA World Cup 2022 concludes on December 18. Many believe the Azadi stadium has been opened for a limited time prior to the tournament in Qatar entirely as a short-term PR stunt to enhance the Iranian Football Association's (FA) image before FIFA's showcase World Cup.

Both the ongoing uprising in Iran in the aftermath of the killing of Mahsa Amini, and the brutal clampdown by the regime towards the protesting Iranian people are, sadly, very familiar to us and bring back many terrifying memories to female football fans in Iran. Mahsa Amini, whose name has become synonymous with the disregard of human life Iranian authorities show towards half of the Iranian population on a daily basis for 44 years now, was killed in the very same detention center where female fans are usually brought to and tortured if we dare to try to attend a football game. Do you remember Sahar Khodayari, AKA "Blue Girl"? She also was brought to Vozara detention and faced prison time before she died by suicide.

Over the past few days, we have seen sports journalists and photographers arrested and left in solitary confinement with no charges brought against them. FIFA has been notified about the arrest of one of nine female journalists allowed to report on the 2018 AFC Champions League final, held at Azadi stadium in your presence, Mr. Infantino. Sports photographer Yalda Moayeri was recently arrested while reporting on the Iranian citizens' calls for freedom. Mrs. Moayeri has reported on the Open Stadiums campaign since their beginnings.

In this past week, we have also seen a footballer and a leader of a fan group, both of whom had joined the call for freedom, killed by Iranian authorities' bullets too.

These and other arrests clearly show that the nexus of the fight for access to football is part of the campaign for civil liberties and free speech more generally, and how authorities perceive both as a threat to their power.

As you know, the Iranian FA, run by ex-commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, is an important ambassador of the Islamic Republic and is acting in line with the repressive regime – a clear case of government interference that has regularly led to the suspension of FIFA members elsewhere in the world.

It comes as no surprise, then, that they have prohibited footballers from showing any solidarity with the Iranian citizens' call for freedom and the victims of the same authorities' brutal crackdown. Striker Sardar Azmoun confirmed in an Instagram post that Iranian national team players are under threat of expulsion from the World Cup squad if they speak out. Sardar's sympathetic post to his fellow Iranian citizens and against the authorities has quickly been deleted and is a testament to the blatant violation of FIFA's statutes and principles by the Iranian FA.

At a recent friendly between Iran and Uruguay played in Austria, two peaceful protesters were removed from the stadium at the direct request of the Iranian FA. And in spite of all this, the Iranian FA remains untouched and seemingly beyond reproach by FIFA.

The Iranian FA is not only an accomplice of the crimes of the regime. It is a direct threat to the security of female fans in Iran and wherever our national team plays in the world. Football should be a safe space for us all. But the restrictive and excessive requirements forced on Iranian fans (especially

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women) to buy tickets exposes us to the whim of security forces. There is no doubt that Qatar will see a heavy presence of the Islamic Republic's state agents, who will travel undercover across the Persian Gulf solely in order to keep Iranian (female) fans and citizens in check, creating potentially dangerous consequences in the aftermath of the tournament for those travelling Iranian fans who make the journey.

That is why, as Iranian football fans, it is with an extremely heavy heart that we have to raise our deepest concern about Iran's participation in the upcoming FIFA World Cup.

Why would FIFA give the Iranian state and its representatives a global stage, while it not only refuses to respect basic human rights and dignities, but is currently torturing and killing its own people? Where are the principles of FIFA's statutes in this regard?

**Therefore, we ask FIFA, based on Articles 3 and 4 of its statutes, to immediately expel Iran from the World Cup 2022 in Qatar.**

This is not only a demand from our groups and campaigns in Iran. We will plead with all fans across the world to highlight, discuss, and back this call for Iran's expulsion from the World Cup, especially because we do not believe this team represents us or our values as Iranian citizens any longer. And, again, we call for action and punishment for years of oppression of women and fans in Iranian sport. The Islamic Republic's authorities and its football federation must not be given the honour of participating in football's finest tournament while it is killing its citizens on our streets.

Without consequences against the Iranian FA and its leadership, we are also legitimately afraid that once the FIFA World Cup concludes this December, the Islamic Republic will take revenge on Open Stadium's women rights activists and on female football fans in general. We foresee not only Azadi stadium's doors closing once again but we also very much fear we will see more unbearable and unforgettable incidents such as Sahar Kodayari's tragic and untimely fate.

Mr. Infantino, FIFA needs to act now to protect Iran's dedicated and passionate female football fans. We are desperate to see our teams play in a safe environment – the same as millions of fans around the world – and expect to receive an answer to our letter without delay.

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