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Belarus: Solidarity with the Athletes' Movement BSSF and Appeal to the Human Rights Due Diligence of Sport Federations

Berlin, 26 May 2021. In light of the recent events in Belarus, Athleten Deutschland reiterates its support for the Belarusian athletes' movement led by the Belarusian Sport Solidarity Foundation ([BSSF](#)). The regime's repressive measures and human rights violations are not sparing sport either.

After the presidential elections in August 2020, Belarusian athletes and individuals associated with Belarusian sport protested against the election results and the political leadership of Belarus. This legitimate protest was countered with repressive measures: According to our information, the BSSF has documented more than 70 cases of reprisals to date, some of which involved psychological and physical violence as well as imprisonment.

The chairwoman of the BSSF, swimmer Aliaksandra Herasimenia, and Aliaksandr Apeikin, director of the BSSF, have themselves [been in the crosshairs](#) of the Belarusian judiciary since April 2021. They are facing criminal proceedings for endangering national security. House searches have taken place; both are on a wanted list. They are [accused](#) of supporting athletes "held responsible for violating the laws of the Republic of Belarus" and of spreading false information about the elections in summer 2020.

The courageous advocacy of the Belarusian athletes' movement and their commitment to human and athletes' rights played a decisive role in the IOC [imposing](#) far-reaching sanctions against the Belarusian National Olympic Committee at the end of 2020. Since autumn 2020, Athleten Deutschland has been in close contact with the BSSF and has written open letters [to the IOC](#) and [German politicians](#) to draw attention to the human rights responsibility of sport in the case of Belarus and the overall situation of Belarusian athletes.

Today we express our solidarity with the BSSF and in particular with Ms Herasimenia and Mr Apeikin, whom we have come to appreciate as reliable partners. We join the calls of other athletes' organisations such as the [World Players Association](#) and [FIFPRO](#) and demand the immediate suspension of the investigations against members of the BSSF, who have been exposing the Belarusian regime's repressive measures against athletes for months and under the most difficult conditions. International sport organisations should use their indisputable influence to protect and support the members of the BSSF.

In recent months, the BSSF has rightfully pointed out human rights violations against Belarusian athletes and individuals associated with Belarusian sport. With regard to the human rights responsibility of sport federations, hosting major sporting events in Belarus must therefore be viewed extremely critically; after all, these are instrumentalised for the purposes of sportswashing by dictator Lukashenka. Together with his son, he is and was responsible for the repressive measures

against Belarusian athletes as a politician and (former) sports official at the same time. Belarus is currently [no longer considered](#) by the IOC as a suitable host for major sporting events. The Ice Hockey World Championships were postponed after weeks of pressure from various stakeholders - not least from politicians on both sides of the Atlantic and sponsors.

Against this background, we welcome in principle the [emerging discourse](#) of several cycling federations on staging the European Track Cycling Championships in Belarus in June.

Maximilian Klein, Representative for International Sport Policy, comments: "*The alarming human rights and safety situation in Belarus has unfortunately not only been known since the shocking plane hijacking last weekend. International cycling has had a long time to make alternative plans. Should the participation in the European Championships in Belarus be cancelled, it is urgent and imperative to find an alternative host venue to provide the starting athletes with important competition practice and qualification opportunities for the Olympics. Athletes should not have to pay the price and take responsibility for the fact that sport federations insufficiently fulfil their obligations of human rights due diligence in the context of major sporting events.*"

Background:

Many facets of sport have a human rights component. Its rules can conflict with universal human rights. These include extreme cases, such as the repression of athletes in Belarus, the persecution and execution of Iranian athletes, or human rights violations of groups of people connected to sport, such as workers building stadiums for major sporting events.

The protagonists of sport - the athletes themselves - are also to be understood as a group that is confronted with regulations and structures that are problematic from a human rights perspective. The difficulties in establishing independent athletes' associations, the restrictions on freedom of expression on the podium and in the competition environment, the unequal treatment of female and male athletes, discrimination and racism in sport, the restrictions on self-marketing during the Olympic Games and the serious cases of violence and abuse of power against athletes are just a few examples.

Athleten Deutschland therefore advocates for a more intensive debate on human rights in sport. Together with a large number of sports and human rights organisations, we [demand](#) that the Olympic Movement coherently commits to respecting and implementing human rights in its sphere of influence, implements a comprehensive human rights strategy and finds a proactive way of dealing with human rights risks in the sphere of sport.

About Athleten Deutschland e.V.:

Athleten Deutschland was founded in 2017 to give Germany's top-level athletes a real say for the first time in the sporting system. The association is committed to deep changes in the German and international sport system. Effective athletes' representation as well as athletes' development and protection are always at the heart of our activities.

Together with our members, we strive for world-class conditions that offer them the opportunity to develop their sporting and personal potential. We stand up for fair and clean sports, free of abuse and violence, manipulation and mismanagement. To fulfil our mission, we cooperate with various actors from public authorities and political stakeholders, business, science and civil society, as well as with likeminded partners in Europe and the world.

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