

28 April 2018

Mr. Gianni Infantino
President, Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)
FIFA-Strasse 20
Zurich, Switzerland

Re: Oyub Titiev, Human Rights Defender in Chechnya, Site of Team Base Camp for Egypt

Dear Mr. Infantino,

We write concerning the human rights crisis in Chechnya, the capital of which, Grozny, was confirmed by FIFA as the team base camp for Egypt. In January 2018, Chechen authorities intensified their attack against the leading Russian human rights organization Memorial, by jailing prominent human rights defender and the head of Memorial's local office, Oyub Titiev, on fabricated criminal charges.

We call upon FIFA to engage with the Russian authorities on the human rights crisis in Chechnya, in particular on the attack against Titiev and Memorial. Such engagement is consistent with FIFA's responsibility to respect human rights under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. It is also consistent with the commitment in article 3 of FIFA's statutes to promote the protection of international human rights, and would demonstrate determination to implement its new Human Rights Policy.

Background on Chechnya

For the past decade, the head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov has repressed even the mildest dissent: whether directly through his officials or through proxies acting with impunity, human rights defenders have been threatened, beaten and killed, while their offices have been set on fire. Kadyrov's security forces conduct extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances against suspected Islamist militants and critics of the government and carry out collective punishments. In May 2017, the Sports and Rights Alliance wrote to you about the anti-gay purge carried out in Chechnya, when dozens of presumed gay men were rounded up, humiliated and tortured. Our organizations have worked on Chechnya for many years and we have documented all these abuses extensively.

In December 2017, two weeks before Titiev's arrest and just after Instagram had blocked the account of the head of Chechnya, Magomed Daudov (Kadyrov's closest associate and the speaker of Chechnya's Parliament) publicly stated that the blocking was due to the activities of human rights defenders. Daudov described human rights defenders as "enemies" who must be "separated from the normal society." After Titiev's arrest, Kadyrov himself stated: "they [human rights

defenders] must know: they will not work in our region.” Kadyrov then promised to “break the back of our enemies.” These statements underscore our conclusion that the criminal case against Titiev is politically motivated.

FIFA can make a difference and has a responsibility to do so

We are concerned, based on our experience in the region, that Kadyrov will seek to take advantage of the use of Grozny as a training camp location to boost his credibility and prestige, and that this will precipitate a further crackdown on human rights work in the lead-up to and aftermath of the World Cup, particularly against critical voices in the region.

FIFA’s Human Rights Policy requires the wide range of entities linked to FIFA to respect human rights. The Policy states that FIFA will “go beyond its responsibility to respect human rights,” including by taking “measures to promote the protection of human rights and positively contribute to their enjoyment, especially where it is able to apply effective leverage.” Pillar III of the Policy, “Protect and Remedy,” confirms “where the freedoms of human rights defenders ... are at risk, FIFA will take adequate measures for their protection, including by using its leverage with the relevant authorities.”

FIFA can immediately act on this commitment by using its leverage with the Russian authorities and directly with President Putin to protect Titiev and Memorial. Such engagement would show that FIFA’s presence in the region does not deflect attention from egregious human rights violations, but rather promotes and protects human rights.

Background on Oyub Titiev

Oyub Titiev, 60, has been director of Memorial’s local office in Grozny for eight years. On January 9, 2018, Chechen police arrested Titiev on trumped-up charges of illegal drug possession. It is not the first case when the persons criticizing the authorities of the Chechen Republic are accused of the alleged possession of drugs. Also, two separate arson incidents against Memorial property in the North Caucasus, in regions neighboring Chechnya, occurred the week after Titiev’s arrest.

Titiev remains in custody pending trial and faces a maximum 10-year prison sentence. Given our collective experience of working in the region, we firmly believe that only sustained international engagement can spare Titiev from a prison sentence and make it possible for Memorial, the sole human rights organization on the ground, to continue its vital work in Chechnya.

Our collective experience also leads us to conclude that Titiev will not receive a fair trial. Chechnya lacks an independent judiciary; the authorities have repeatedly harassed, intimidated and directly pressured judges and jury members. Titiev’s conviction, should a trial go forward, and the forced closure of Memorial in Chechnya which would inevitably follow, would be a scandal, particularly as it will take place in a region that is a base camp for a FIFA finalist team. This scandal would cast a cloud

over the 2018 FIFA World Cup and stain the efforts we know FIFA is making to announce a policy on Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.

We are convinced that the authorities have retaliated against Titiev for his human rights work in an effort to force Memorial out of Chechnya. The persecution of Titiev and Memorial threatens the very possibility of human rights work in Chechnya. It is a brazen attempt to silence all those critical of Chechen authorities and leaves victims of abuses with little or no support. We are certain that FIFA can play a crucial role in helping to remedy this situation, and that it is uniquely positioned to influence the Russian government in this regard. In particular, FIFA can call on the Russian authorities and directly on President Putin to immediately and unconditionally release Oyub Titiev, impartially to investigate attacks against Memorial and ensure a safe and enabling environment in which it is possible to defend and promote human rights without fear of punishment, reprisal or intimidation.

We thank you for your attention and look forward your earliest response.

Sincerely,

Front Line Defenders
Norwegian Helsinki Committee
FIDH (within the framework of the Observatory for the protection of human rights defenders)
OMCT (within the framework of the Observatory for the protection of human rights defenders)
Conflict Analysis and Prevention Center
Human Rights Watch
Committee against Torture
International Memorial
Civil Rights Defenders
Amnesty International
Russian LGBT Network
People in Need
Freedom House
Civic Assistance Committee

(Signatures of the organizations' leading representatives enclosed with the original letter)