

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Human Rights Council

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Quadrennial panel discussion on promoting human rights through sport and the Olympic ideal

Statement delivered by Vincent Metten on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

Dear Madame President Khan; dear speakers and panellists,
We welcome today's panel discussion on the promotion of human rights through sport and the Olympic ideal.

The Olympic Games, and other international sporting events can all contribute to an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding among peoples and nations. At the same time, they can present threats to human rights. This is particularly true if the Games are awarded to governments that are responsible for widespread and systematic human rights violations. We believe that discussions at the Human Rights Council on the matter of sports and human rights must address this issue.

In this context, we are deeply concerned about the awarding of the Olympic Winter Games 2022 to Beijing. The IOC's decision did not take into consideration the experience gained following the 2008 Summer Olympics in China. Presumptions, communicated strenuously by the IOC at the time, that the Olympics would encourage China to embrace transparency and human rights, did not materialize. Instead, the 2008 Olympics emboldened policies of the Chinese Communist Party that are fundamentally adverse to human rights principles and norms.

In Tibet, in 2008, the Chinese Communist Party engaged in a violent clampdown of overwhelmingly peaceful protests, and since then, the Party has established a surveillance state with omnipresent indoctrination, and with the stated goal to 'sinicize' Tibetans. In Xinjiang, more than two million Uyghurs and others have been detained in internment camps. Hongkong has lost freedoms guaranteed by international law.

In September 2020, a coalition of human rights groups called on the IOC to revoke its decision awarding Beijing the contract to host the 2022 Winter Olympic Games. In February 2021, a coalition of more than 180 civil society organisations urged governments to commit to a diplomatic boycott of the Games.

In conclusion, we would like to ask today's panellists: Can awarding the Games to an authoritarian state like the PRC have a negative effect on young athletes, and may this even be detrimental to an "atmosphere of tolerance and understanding among peoples and nations", and run counter to the UN General Assembly's stated expectations and the fundamental principles of Olympism?

Thank you.