



**SPORT &
RIGHTS
ALLIANCE**

RAISING THE BAR FOR
SPORT, HUMAN RIGHTS
AND TRANSPARENCY

March 10, 2025

Mattias Grafström,
Secretary General

Re: FIFA's Support to the Afghanistan Women's National Football Team

c/c:

Dear Mr. Grafström,

Kevin Lamour,
Chief Operating
Officer

We write on behalf of the [Sport & Rights Alliance](#), a global coalition committed to embedding human rights standards in the world of sport. We serve as a force multiplier for civil society groups and trade unions working to promote the rights of everyone affected by sport, including athletes, fans, activists, journalists, workers, children, women and LGBTI people.

Elkhan Mammadov,
Chief Member
Associations Officer

Sarai Bareman, FIFA
Chief Women's
Football Officer

As part of our work, we strive to build connection and power among impacted athletes including through our signature program, the [Athletes Network for Safer Sports](#). Over the past years, we have provided assistance to the Afghanistan Women's National Football Team (AWNT) players in their struggle to exist and continue to play the sport they love.

Gerd Dembowski,
Head of Human
Rights & Anti-
Discrimination

This letter is meant to request information for our upcoming report provisionally entitled "*It's not just a game. It's part of who I am*": *Afghan Women's Fight for the Right to Play*. We also take the opportunity to inform you of updated testimonies and calls from AWNT players to FIFA, as well as inquiry FIFA's response to these findings.

Fédération
Internationale de
Football Association
(FIFA)

FIFA-Strasse 20,
8044 Zürich
Switzerland

Afghan women football players struggle to exist

As you know, within days of the Taliban's 2021 takeover, the new government [singled out the AWNT players for reprisals](#). Established in 2007 after the fall of the first Taliban regime, the AWNT was a powerful symbol of the promise of gender equality in a post-Taliban Afghanistan. Against the [Taliban's oppressive views of women and girls](#), the very existence of the AWNT was a direct challenge to their ideology.

The AWNT players were forced to burn all evidence of their football careers and go into hiding while they waited to be evacuated out of the country. AWNT player Ahdia Haidari remembered "hiding in one room for almost two weeks, feeling scared as the Taliban fired guns to frighten people." AWNT national team members were flown to Melbourne, while members of the AWNT youth and club teams found refuge in Portugal and England, respectively.

Prior to fleeing the country, AWNT players also faced internal threats from senior leadership within the Afghanistan Football Federation (AFF). In 2017, AWNT players made [detailed reports to FIFA of sexual abuse by leaders within the AFF](#). After going public in 2018, a subsequent investigation found that indeed former AFF president Keramuudin Karim, among others, had assaulted multiple AWNT players between 2013 and 2018 – the entire span of his AFF presidency. He was then banned from the sport for life.

Calls from the AWNT to FIFA

Despite the immense hardships and setbacks faced by the players, the AWNT women's team remains resilient and ready to play – ready to showcase not just their talent but also their strength to both their nation and the world. Afghan women football players preserve their hope that FIFA, as head of world football, restores the AWNT right to play in exile by:

- (a) Recognizing the AWNT in exile, and restoring their right to play and represent their country in international competitions as a symbol of hope and solidarity with women and girls in Afghanistan;
- (b) Providing financial support, as it does for other Member Associations, to equip and provide capacity for the team to continue training and competing in exile;
- (c) Ensuring an inclusive player-led process, respecting AWNT players' views and agency;
- (d) Providing trauma-informed care and holistic security (physical, psychological and digital) to players and coaches involved with the team; and
- (e) Negotiating for and including the AWNT in future pathways for playing and coaching programs, encompassing career transitioning planning, financial literacy, retirement planning services and other opportunities.

These steps would be fully aligned with FIFA's adopted [Statutes](#) and [Human Rights Policy](#) which "prohibits all forms of discrimination"; obliges FIFA and its Member associations to "promote the development of women's football"; and commits to both "respecting human rights, as enshrined in the [UN Guiding Principles](#), 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 to help increase said enjoyment or where this relates to strengthening human rights in or through football." Lastly, ensuring the recognition and support to the AWNT would also provide a positive alternative to an eventual call to sanction the AFF for violating FIFA Statutes and Human Rights Policy.

Outstanding Questions to FIFA

In light of these reports and the AWNT's requests, we would like to request FIFA's response to the following questions:

1. Has FIFA continued to fund the AFF, including via the FIFA Forward programme? If so, please provide details of the amounts, purpose, and audits to ensure funds proper usage in line with FIFA regulations.
2. What concrete measures is FIFA ready take to support the recognition of the AWNT and allow them to represent their country in international competitions?
3. Would FIFA agree to provide financial support to the AWNT in exile, to facilitate their training and participation in matches, at least until women are able to safely play again in Afghanistan?
4. Has FIFA taken any steps to ensure Afghanistan is included in the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers draw, to be held on [27 March 2025](#) according to AFC's calendar?
5. Would FIFA be willing to support and facilitate official friendly and/or exhibition matches involving the AWNT, including around major regional and global tournaments?
6. How is FIFA enforcing its anti-discrimination policies with the AFF, ensuring its relationships do not contribute to adverse human rights impacts, and that its Member Associations prioritize gender equality and promote women's football?

The Sport & Rights Alliance stands with the players of the AWNT and their sisters in Afghanistan who are subject to daily oppression at the hands of the Taliban's gender discrimination regime. We have witnessed in hope President Infantino's [declaration during the 2024 Paris Olympics](#) that he would be ready to provide "access to girls and women to play sport in Afghanistan, and to support their representation on the national stage". FIFA's recognition and support to the AWNT would remind the world that no one can extinguish the power of sport to promote equal and just societies.

We look forward to your response and we remain at your disposal if you have any questions. Any response to the above questions by March 19, 2025, as well as any other information that you can provide will be reflected in our upcoming reporting. We can be contacted by email at andrea@sportandrightsalliance.org.

Sincerely,



Andrea Florence
Director
Sport & Rights Alliance



Joanna Maranhão, OLY (swimming, Brazil)
Network Coordinator
Sport & Rights Alliance



Gabriela Garton (football, Argentina)
Advisory Council Member
SRA Athletes Network for Safer Sports



Kaiya McCullough (football, USA)
Advisory Council Member
SRA Athletes Network for Safer Sports



Ahmar Maiga (basketball, Mali)
Advisory Council Member
SRA Athletes Network for Safer Sports



Mary Cain (track & field, USA)
Advisory Council Member
SRA Athletes Network for Safer Sports

About the Sport & Rights Alliance

The Sport & Rights Alliance's mission is to promote the rights and well-being of those most affected by human rights risks associated with the delivery of sport. Its partners include **Amnesty International, The Army of Survivors, Committee to Protect Journalists, Football Supporters Europe, Human Rights Watch, ILGA World (The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association)**, the **International Trade Union Confederation, Transparency International** and **World Players Association, UNI Global Union**. As a global coalition of leading NGOs and trade unions, the SRA works together to ensure sports bodies, governments and other relevant stakeholders give rise to a world of sport that protects, respects, and fulfills international standards for human rights, labor rights, child wellbeing and safeguarding, and anti-corruption. A program of the Sport & Rights Alliance, the **Athletes Network for Safer Sports** brings together athletes, allies, survivors, victims and whistleblowers with a mission to create and strengthen safe spaces for people affected by abuse in sport – promoting healing, amplifying each other's voices, and advocating for systemic change. The Network is guided by an Advisory Council composed of athletes and allies impacted by abuse in sport, who are responsible for providing the Network with overall programmatic guidance and strategic support. The SRA Director, Andrea Florence is based in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and can be reached at +55 11 98420 0025 or andrea@sportandrightsalliance.org.