

# Days before Paris 2024 Olympics start

## Calls to Int'l Olympic Committee, FIFA to ban Israel

# grow



By Mehdi Ebrahim  
Staff writer

### PERSPECTIVE

Since the start of Israel's genocidal war on the besieged Gaza Strip in October last year, international sports organizations, rights groups, and pro-Palestine movements across the world have called for limiting or suspending Israel's participation at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. In a strongly-worded statement on May 18, the Geneva-based Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor (Euro-Med Monitor) said the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) must hold Israel accountable for its crimes against Palestinian athletes. The rights group underlined that international sports organizations must take "decisive action" against Israel as at least 270 Palestinian athletes have been killed since October 7, 2023, and 31 sports facilities, football fields, gyms, and sports training halls have been destroyed, which accounts for over eighty percent of the stadium- and club-level sports facilities in the Gaza Strip.

The Euro-Med added that 300 five-a-side courts, 22 swimming pools, six tennis stadiums, and 12 covered sports halls for basketball, volleyball, and handball have been bulldozed and destroyed. Twenty-eight sports and fitness centers have also been damaged.

The stadiums of Yarmouk, Palestine, Mohammed Al-Durrah, Beit Hanoun, Al-Tuffah, Al-Shuja'iya, Al-Shati, Beit Lahia, Rafah, Deir al-Balah, and Nuseirat were among the major sports facilities destroyed by the Israeli aggression.

The Euro-Med Monitor said Israel also converted some stadiums into mass graves, abuse centers, and detention spots in blatant disregard of all regional, national, and international laws and conventions.

The statement stressed that Israel's months-long onslaught resulted in the cancellation of all sporting events, competitions, and activities while hundreds of Gaza Strip athletes were denied their right to travel and represent Palestine in different international competitions.

"The ongoing genocide in the Gaza Strip must be addressed by FIFA, whose fundamental laws

and disciplinary and ethical rules specifically forbid support for actions that violate international law and human rights," the Euro-Med also noted.

"Failure to consider the Gaza Strip genocide would raise serious questions of double standards in FIFA's operations and policies," the rights groups added, referring to FIFA's move to swiftly impose a complete ban on Russia's participation in international competitions after Moscow's war in Ukraine in February 2022.

Earlier last month, the Palestinian Football Association (PFA) announced that it had sent letters to the International Olympic Committee and FIFA demanding an "urgent international probe into occupation crimes against sports and athletes in Palestine".

"In the latest example of Israeli fascism, the occupation showed us horrific images during its invasion of the Yarmouk Stadium in the Gaza Strip, and turned it into a detention center where it abused and interrogated our people," the PFA said.

"This blatant and scandalous violation of all covenants is added to a long series of violations against Palestinian sports, in-

cluding the killing and arrest of players. This is a crime that the international sports institutions cannot tolerate, silence, and ignore."

Amid rising calls for Tel Aviv to be banished from international sports, the pro-Palestine Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement advocated for Israel's football association to be expelled or suspended for hosting FIFA-sanctioned matches in the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank.

"FIFA has for years actively shielded Israel from accountability for its ongoing war crimes and violations of FIFA's own statutes through its inclusion of teams in illegal Israeli settlements on stolen Palestinian land," the BDS said in a statement five months ago.

"FIFA has gone so far as to sanction not the illegal settlement clubs but fan clubs expressing support for Palestinian human rights. This is how these hypocritical bodies express neutrality."

Moreover, a group of 12 soccer associations in the Middle East region urged FIFA in a letter to ban Israel from global participation in the sport. Signatories of

the letter include soccer associations from Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. The letter has been sent to all 211 soccer federations and six regional confederations including the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA).

On New Year's Eve, Jordan's Football Association (JFA) also released a statement calling on the global sports community to take "decisive action to stop the aggression against Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied territories".

The statement called for stringent sanctions targeting Israeli sports associations in an attempt to isolate them from international sports. This would include barring Israeli teams, clubs, players, and representatives from participating in international competitions "until the occupying entity complies with international cease-fire demands".

"The blatant disregard for moral and humanitarian laws has transfigured football facilities in Gaza into sites of harm, humiliation, and abuse for innocent civilians and children, deviating from their intended purpose

as spaces of joy and hope," read the statement. "Silence in their critical circumstances may be perceived as an implicit endorsement of the occupation's unlawful practices, potentially implicating parties in these grievous atrocities."

The Islamic Republic of Iran, alongside other regional countries supporting the Palestinian cause, has also been pushing for the suspension of Israel and the regime's representatives from all sports activities.

Mehdi Taj, the president of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI), walked out of an annual FIFA Congress meeting in Thailand's capital of Bangkok on May 17 in support of Palestinians suffering from Israel's barbaric war on Gaza.

Taj said the protest took place during the statements of the representative of the Israeli regime and that several other representatives, including from Iraq and Lebanon, also left the congress in condemnation of the illegal entity.

During FIFA's annual congress in Thailand, Palestinian Football Association President Jibril Rajoub stressed that Israel had committed multiple "systemat-

ic" violations of FIFA statutes as well as flagrant breaches of human rights in Gaza.

"The Palestinian people, including the Palestinian football family, are enduring an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe," Rajoub said. "We are witnessing a live televised genocide happening in Gaza."

The world's football governing body is scheduled to convene an extraordinary council meeting by July 20 to discuss whether to take action against the Israeli federation upon the Palestinian Federation's request to suspend the regime's membership, a request that has the backing of the Asian Football Confederation.

The Israeli regime's brutal aggression on Gaza came after Palestinian resistance groups carried out Operation Al-Aqsa Storm on October 7, 2023, against the occupying entity in retaliation for its intensified atrocities against the Palestinian people.

With the barbaric war well into its eighth month, the Tel Aviv regime has so far killed more than 37,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured over 84,000 others.

Palestinian children are seen at a sports facility destroyed in an Israeli attack on Gaza, Palestine, on May 24, 2024.

AA