

Warsaw, 21 June 2018

Mr Zbigniew Boniek
President of Polish Football
Association (PZPN)
ul. Bitwy Warszawskiej 1920 r. 7
02-366 Warszawa

Dear Sir,

In May 2017, the FIFA International Football Federation adopted a document entitled "FIFA Human Rights Policy". In this document it undertakes to respect human rights and promote the protection of those rights. It also undertakes to support persons fighting for the observance of human rights worldwide, as well as media representatives, and in the situation where the freedom of these persons is threatened, undertake actions in their defence. FIFA also declares that in such situations it will use forms of pressure on relevant state authorities that are available to it.

Objectives adopted by FIFA are strictly connected with tasks implemented by the Polish Football Association. In accordance with its statute, the Polish Football Association fulfils its objectives in particular through cooperation, and organising and maintaining contacts with national football federations abroad, as well as cooperation in the fulfilment of objectives and tasks of FIFA.

Due to the fact that Poland's representation participates currently in the World Cup held in Russia, we would like to appeal to you to undertake, together with FIFA, actions in support of human rights protection by the authorities of the Russian Federation, including efforts to release all persons imprisoned for political reasons.

NGOs and independent media would like to turn your attention to the huge number of political prisoners put in detention centres and prisons by the authorities of the Russian Federation – human rights activists, oppositionists, and journalists. Lists of the Memorial Human Rights Defence Centre include currently as many as 158 political prisoners and 77 persons who have very likely been imprisoned for political reasons. At the same time, Memorial points out the fact that those lists do not include all of the repressed persons because the true number of political prisoners and people deprived of freedom for political reasons in today's Russia is undoubtedly much higher.

According to the available reports from NGOs, Ukrainian nationals also create a large group of people illegally imprisoned by the authorities of the Russian Federation. NGOs have information about 71 Ukrainian citizens whose persecution may be deemed politically motivated. During the times when countries openly celebrate the opening of the World Cup, in one of the penal colonies a Ukrainian national, Oleg Sentsov, has been on a hunger strike for a month, demanding that all Ukrainian political prisoners are released. He was convicted for 20 years of imprisonment. He has announced that he intends to continue his hunger strike until he dies.

In the recent months the public opinion was outraged by the history of arrest of Oyub Titiev, chairman of a local branch of the Russian organisation “Memorial” Human Rights Defence Centre in Chechnya. On 9 January 2018, his car was stopped and searched, and during the search – in the opinion of lawyers, NGOs, and independent media – drugs were planted on him. Oyub Titiev brought help to victims of serious violations of human rights – torture, forced disappearances, he also helped families of persons killed by services connected to the republic’s authorities. For the last few months before his arrest, Titiev and other Memorial workers dealt with the well-known case of 27 residents of the republic who were arrested and then vanished (probably shot). Titiev’s lawyers point out to numerous and blatant breaches during the arrest and proceedings. The prosecution has not presented any credible evidence that a crime has been committed so far. Despite this, Titiev is still under arrest, exposed to torture (which according to the reports available are commonly used in Chechen prisons), he is threatened by a high imprisonment penalty.

Amnesty International considered Oyub Titiev to be a prisoner of conscience because he had been arrested exclusively for exercising his rights peacefully and for his human rights work. Already over 2,200 persons in Poland signed Amnesty International’s petition concerning the Chechen human rights defender. Amnesty International, together with other international organisations, sent a letter concerning Oyub Titiev to the President of FIFA, Gianni Infantino, who confirmed the Federation’s will to act in protection of human rights defenders.

NGOs and independent media for years have been pointing out the mass problem of human rights violations in Chechnya and the huge problem with their observance in the whole of North Caucasus. At the moment, Chechnya is actively included in the organisation of the World Cup – it constitutes the basis for the representation of Egypt. Sochi, located relatively near it – where part of the games are held – is also in North Caucasus. **In our opinion, the lack of response and the failure to bring up human rights issues in Russia during the World Cup is in fact a permission given to the breaching of human rights by the authorities of the Russian Federation.**

We believe that Polish Football Association has a moral and ethical obligation to broach subject of the violation of human rights in Russia in conversations with FIFA, including the

freeing of Titiev, Sentsov and other illegally imprisoned persons. **We believe that all football organisations of the countries participating in this year's World Cup should call upon the Russian Federation to observe national and international obligations concerning human rights, including the freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom of assembly.**

We are counting on your actions and notification of the public opinion about steps undertaken and their results.

Yours sincerely,

Polish members of the Forum of Civic Society of the European Union and Russia:

Citizens Network Watchdog Poland
For Free Russia Association
Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights
Homo Faber Association
Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe
KARTA Center Foundation
Institute for Public Affairs
Stefan Batory Foundation

And other organisations with fates of human rights defenders at heart:

Amnesty International
Autonomia Foundation
ePaństwo Foundation
Other Space Foundation
Kaukaz.net Foundation
Foundation for Equality and Emancipation STER
Our Choice Foundation
Panoptikon Foundation
Field of Dialogue Foundation
Foundation for Positive Changes
„Różnosfera” Foundation
School for Leaders Foundation
School with Class Foundation
Grupa Zagranica - Polish platform of 54 civil society organizations engaged in development cooperation, democracy support, humanitarian aid and global education.
Open House
Institute for Law and Society INPRIS
Lubuskie Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Kobiet Baba Association
Polish Migration Forum Foundation
Polish Society of Anti-Discrimination Law
Unit for Social Innovation and Research “Shipyard”
Professor Zbigniew Hołda Association.
Stanisław Brzozowski Association
Association of Grassroots Activities „RzeczJasna”
Association of Women Initiatives
Association for Legal Intervention (SIP)
Klon/Jawor Association

NOMADA Association for Multicultural Society Integration
Association for Sustainable Social Development "FAIR Society"
Society Against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia „Open Republic“
Love Does Not Exclude Association