

FIFA International Religious Freedom Petition

International Federation of Association Football (FIFA)
Strasse 20, P.O Box 8044
Zurich, Switzerland

November 22, 2022

Dear President Gianni Infantino,

We are deeply concerned with the participation of human rights violating countries in the 2022 FIFA World Cup, notably hosted by Qatar. Several competing countries significantly restrict the rights of women and girls to freely participate in society and discriminate against Christians and religious minorities. The fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief is significantly curtailed in at least three participating countries – Qatar, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. These countries allow the death penalty in blasphemy cases and related offenses. They also criminalize proselytization by Christians and routinely engage in persecution and violence against religious converts of Islam.

The discriminatory laws enforced by these countries intimidates religious minorities and curtails their participation in national football leagues. The general contempt created by these laws results in backlash against minority faith groups —such as in 2017 when a Muslim cleric in Saudi Arabia called on FIFA to ban players from celebrating with the sign of the cross, a customary practice in Christianity. Another example comes from a case in 2016, when Iranian clerics ordered attendees of a FIFA match to wear black and refrain from clapping during the match, since it fell on a holiday observed by some Muslims. To FIFA's credit, you responded appropriately by fining the Iranian Football Association \$53,000.

We support punishments such as fines to hold bad actors accountable, but still are concerned that intimidation continues to occur at the world's most watched sporting event and that human rights violating countries are allowed to take part and host the World Cup.

FIFA's own rules, specifically Article 3 of the FIFA Statutes, clearly prohibits discrimination of any kind. Additionally, FIFA made the commitment in Section 2 of its human rights policy to consider the plight of religious minorities.

With an estimated five billion viewers during this World Cup, the eyes of the world are on FIFA. We call on you to uphold the commitments FIFA has made in its governing documents and to inalienable human rights at large. FIFA must clearly communicate that intolerance and discrimination against minority faiths is unacceptable. We urge FIFA to include the protection of freedom of religion or belief as a core element of its human rights policy and to take proper action to hold national federations accountable for engaging in discriminatory practices.

You made the promise – we simply ask that you keep it.

Sincerely,

Jeff King,
President
International Christian Concern (and attached)

CC:
Secretary General of FIFA Fatma Samoura
Secretary of State Antony Blinken
United States Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain