



Committee to Protect Journalists

October 14, 2014

Thomas Bach  
President  
International Olympic Committee  
Château de Vidy  
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Switzerland

*Via fax: +41 21 621 62 16*

Dear President Bach,

It was a pleasure to meet with you and your staff in Lausanne on September 4. We were pleased to discuss our shared interest in ensuring free reporting from the Games. I write to you now with specific proposals to achieve this objective. We make these proposals keeping mind the language of the Olympic Charter which calls for respect for universal fundamental ethical principles, non-discrimination, and the educational value of good example.

Following the withdrawal by Oslo of its bid for the 2022 Winter Olympics, only two cities remain: Beijing (China) and Almaty (Kazakhstan). Both countries face significant challenges in terms of their human rights and press freedom records.

In our meeting, we discussed two proposals; the first a process for ensuring that the host city is in a position meet its press freedom commitments; the second, which you yourself proposed, is to create a formal mechanism to respond to complaints from journalists covering the Games.

On the first point, we propose that the IOC create an external advisory group composed of leading journalists (including journalists previously accredited to cover the Games) and media experts who would review the bids and provide expert advice to the Evaluation Commission. This advice would be of a technical nature, and could consist of the following:

1. Is the press freedom environment improving or deteriorating?
2. Does the country have journalists in prison?
3. Does the government exercise formal censorship of controversial issues? Is there widespread self-censorship?
4. Is the Internet censored or controlled?
5. Does the government have a record of carrying out full and credible investigations into attacks on media professionals?

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6. Does the government have a record of keeping commitments regarding press freedom made to the international community and of complying with international legal decisions, such as those issued by the European Court of Human Rights, the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, and other regional and global legal bodies?

The recommendations of the external advisory group would be a non-binding contribution to the work of the Evaluation Commission. However, the press freedom report would be made public in the case of the winning bid.

To follow up on your proposal, which we had the opportunity to discuss with Mark Adams and Jochen Färber, we would also welcome the creation of a formal complaint mechanism for responding to issues that arise with coverage of the Games. As discussed during the meeting, the IOC already has an informal procedure to address such issues.

The formal mechanism could consist of a form on the IOC website where individual journalists, news organizations, or press freedom groups can report potential violations in the run-up to and during the Games. The IOC should have a dedicated staff person to evaluate the claims in timely manner. If the claims are found credible, the IOC would notify the host organizing committee and request immediate resolution. As a minimum, the organizing committee would be required to respond formally to the IOC within a specified time frame. Following the Games, the IOC would make all complaints and responses available to the public on its website.

To be clear, we believe that the mechanism should respond to all journalists, accredited or not, covering issues related to the Games, including street protests, cost overruns, allegations of corruption or mismanagement, and environmental issues. Such reporting benefits the Olympic movement by ensuring good governance, public oversight of the Games, and confidence in the integrity of the institutions.

As you noted, there are many advantages of such a formalized approach. The IOC is already committed to ensuring the fullest possible Olympic coverage. A formal mechanism would make this clear to journalists and would help the IOC's work by allowing it to address complaints in a systematic manner.

“Where CPJ sees an issue in a country, you can let us know in advance, and we can [address it],” you suggested. We commit to doing so.

We hope to work together to have the formal complaint mechanism in place for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.



Committee to Protect Journalists

We look forward to your response and to ongoing discussion on these proposals. We gladly accept your invitation to return next year for a follow-up meeting, and will work with your staff to make arrangements.

Sincerely,

Joel Simon  
Executive Director

CC  
Mark Adams, IOC Director of Communications  
Jochen Färber, IOC Head of the Executive office of the President  
Magnus Ag, CPJ Assistant Advocacy Director