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THE EXECUTION OF NAVID AFKARI:

HOW THE INTERNATIONAL SPORTS COMMUNITY MUST RESPOND

FIVE ESSENTIAL COMMITMENTS

The reported hanging of wrestling athlete Navid Afkari is a repudiation by Iran of its membership of the international sports community and an injustice that can never be repeated. It is a brazen act in the face of a global campaign by athletes, the sports and human rights movement and parts of the international sports community that demanded clemency for Navid. Navid was callously targeted by Iran as a high-profile athlete in the iconic sport of wrestling, falsely convicted and condemned to death by means of a coerced confession obtained through his torture and that of his two brothers, Vahid and Habib.

Some within the international sports community have already claimed Navid's execution is unrelated to sport. Athletes sit at the heart of sport and are, first and foremost, human beings. They are entitled to due process and a fair trial free of any threat of torture or execution.

The international sports community must respond to the execution of Navid quickly and effectively. If Iran's act is without consequence, then the rights, safety and lives of athletes throughout the world who speak up for human rights and social justice and against discrimination and oppression are in grave danger.

An effective response by the international sports community must include **five essential commitments**:

(1) The execution of Navid is fundamentally inconsistent with Iran’s continuing membership of the international sports community

The execution of Navid must result in Iran’s immediate exclusion from the international sports community through the imposition of sporting sanctions by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) with the possibility of sanctions by the International Federations (IFs). As a starting point, Iran must be excluded from:

- (a) the Tokyo 2021 Olympic Games by the IOC;
- (b) international wrestling events, competitions and governance by United World Wrestling (UWW). Other IFs should follow suit given that Iran’s repression of human rights in connection with sport is endemic; and
- (c) any consideration to host international sporting events, such as the 2027 Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Asian Cup in the sport of football, which Iran has bid for.

To the extent possible, sporting sanctions should be tailored to avoid impacting the right of Iranian athletes to compete. However, it also needs to be recognised that the right of any athlete to compete can only be enjoyed if the internationally recognised human rights of all athletes – including the rights to life and freedom of association and expression – are respected, protected and guaranteed.

(2) IOC and IF condemnation of the death penalty and the use of torture

The IOC and IFs must announce their condemnation of the use of the death penalty, torture and any form of degrading treatment on athletes, any member of the international sports community and any person affected by the activities of the international sports community.

(3) IOC and IF support for athlete activism in the field

The IOC and IFs should take a public stand that they support athlete activism throughout the world and take action against the repression of athletes who stand up for human rights and social justice and against discrimination and oppression.

(4) Joint acceleration of a collective effort to embed human and athlete rights in international sport

The IOC and IFs must accelerate efforts to embed human and athlete rights throughout the world of sport. As an initial measure, the long-awaited IOC's human rights responsibility, commitment and strategy must be:

- (a) embedded within the governance of international sport, including the IOC and IFs, and be effectively resourced;
- (b) in place in time for the 2021 Tokyo Olympics; and
- (c) developed in partnership with civil society including the Sport & Rights Alliance (SRA). The IOC and the SRA previously demonstrated their capacity to work together through discussions which saw the inclusion of human rights and anti-corruption provisions into the IOC Host City Contract from 2024. It is now abundantly clear that progress to respect, protect and promote human rights cannot wait until then.

(5) An investigation into the targeting of athlete activists for political purposes

The IOC and IFs, in partnership with the Centre for Sport & Human Rights (CSHR) and human rights experts, must commission an independent investigation with the requisite powers and resources in relation to the targeting of athlete activists for political purposes.

Last year, the international sports community acted to help save the life of Bahraini refugee Hakeem Al-Araibi who was involved in peaceful protests in Bahrain in 2011. Hakeem, along with 150 other athletes were detained, tortured and falsely charged with serious criminal offences. The international sports community was unable to save Navid Afkari who was associated with protests in Iran in 2018.

Not only is such conduct an appalling violation of internationally recognised human rights, it constitutes political interference in sport of the most grotesque form.