



Women Win Foundation, Inc.
Email: info@womenwin.org
Stichting Women Win
Rapenburgerstraat 173
1011 VM, Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Email: info@womenwin.org

30 July 2021

Ms. Astrid Aafjes, Founder and President
CC: Ms. Maria Bobenrieth, Executive Director

REQUEST TO REVIEW PUMA's MEMBERSHIP WITH WOMEN WIN

Dear Ms. Aafjes,

I am writing to request that you please undertake a thorough review of PUMA's membership with Women Win Foundation, Inc.

Having spoken widely on human and gender rights issues, let alone participated in advocacy campaigns focused gender rights and social change for women and girls, I trust you will easily see the discrepancy of PUMA's claims of being committed to the highest standards of ESG and its widely criticised association with the Israel Football Association (IFA) by a large number of NGOs and civic rights groups.

PUMA, has to-date ignored hundreds of calls from divergent range of civil society and human rights groups to end its four-year sponsorship of the IFA, under which it agreed to provide equipment to all Israeli national football teams, including kits.

The IFA is a sports grouping that includes teams from Israel's illegal settlements, built on stolen Palestinian land in continuing violation of a litany of international laws.

While IFA and PUMA will waste no time claiming football is above politics and its PR machinery may even claim a ban on playing in settlements would punish children involved with the clubs, it has said or done nothing to address the same issue of Palestinians living under Israel's brutal occupation that PUMA's sponsorship enables.

In the words of an aspiring female athlete in Palestine:

Being an athlete in Palestine is not easy... Here, we are surrounded by Israel's roadblocks, separation walls, segregated roads and settlements. Israel's infrastructure of occupation and apartheid is denying all Palestinians, including athletes, any freedom of movement. We are being harassed, intimidated and humiliated by Israeli forces on a regular basis....We are constantly subjected to....military checkpoints when we travel for training sessions or events. Our matches get interrupted and raided by armed soldiers. Our pitches get swallowed by ever-expanding illegal settlements and our stadiums destroyed by Israeli bombs. (Source: [Aljazeera, 27 October 2019](#))

On the IFA, [The Guardian](#) in May 2015 reported:

The IFA....has racially segregated part of its national children's league, incurring legal action. It has never once disciplined Beitar Jerusalem FC for that club's longstanding apparent ban on the hiring of Arab players, or taken serious action to curb the notorious anti-Arab violence of its supporters.

Therefore, PUMA's sponsorship of the IFA, and the international legitimacy that it callously grants, is nothing short of a tacit endorsement of Israel's expansion of illegal settlements (i.e., sports-washing its Israel's system of oppression) while thousands of Palestinian families are continually forced off their ancestral lands, in violation of international law.

This letter however, is not a standalone appeal to the Women Win Foundation, Inc.

In April 2017, over one hundred sports associations, trade unions including [UN advisers](#), [dozens of elected officials](#), [public figures](#) and [civil society and human rights NGOs](#), representing millions of people from 28 countries across the globe, joined football champions, scholars, film directors, politicians and government officials in [calling on](#) FIFA's Council members to insist that IFA revoke the affiliation of [seven clubs](#) based in the illegal Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian territory, or face suspension from FIFA. Yet nothing has changed.

PUMA or IFA may therefore dismissively claim, the clubs in question are all minor, non-professional outfits from the settlements but they have failed to address the racial segregation, institutionalised racism let alone violence inflicted by a subsection of IFA's most rabid supporters against aspiring Palestinians children, youth and teenagers, both male and female.

As a sponsor of the IFA, PUMA also associates itself directly with fellow sponsors and companies widely criticised by NGO groups and the UN Office of Human Rights Office such as Factory 54, which operates out of Kiryat Ekron, (stolen Palestinian land) and Mey Eden Water, which extracts water from reservoirs located in the Southern Golan Heights (illegally annexed territory), exposing PUMA's weak underlying commitment to human rights.

Furthermore, a Human Rights Watch [report](#), published in September 2016 showed the IFA was engaging in business activity that supported the settlements and that “the clubs provide services to Israelis but do not provide them to Palestinians, who are not allowed to enter settlements except as labourers bearing special permits”.

In many of PUMA’s CSR reports, the company loudly proclaims how “sports is meant to empower athletes” but in reality the company does the exact opposite. By sponsoring and thus, lending credibility to a name closely associated with the illegal occupation, PUMA in its association with the IFA has repeatedly chosen to stand with a key enabler of the occupier, enabling oppression against voiceless athletes and their families living under the illegal occupation of West Bank and East Jerusalem today.

Puzzlingly, PUMA claims “compliance with human rights, labor rights and environmental standards is a top priority” callously citing its #REFORM hashtag wherever and whenever possible. Yet, evidence suggest PUMA egregiously supports a football association that is an apartheid enabler, to paraphrase reports by numerous human rights and civil society NGOs. Either Israel is lying or Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and 2-3 dozens odd NGOs and human rights groups are.

Therefore for a company that claims “every manufacturer has to go through a compliance audit for [ESG] before starting the business relationship”, it isn’t too much to ask for PUMA to run a “compliance audit” for athletes, ambassadors or sports club it sponsors.

Since the Women Win Foundation, Inc. represents a collaborative effort of socially responsible companies committed to advancing the lives of girls and women, PUMA which has chosen to side with the oppressors while no other major sports brand will, should no longer be allowed to associate itself with the apolitical Women Win Foundation, Inc.

We hope the board at Women Win Foundation, Inc. will raise this issue in your next meeting and review PUMA’s membership with your foundation.

Yours sincerely,

Siddiq Bazarwala
Founder, The Gaza Fund
siddiqbazarwala@gmail.com

www.thegazafund.com

The Gaza Fund is a NGO with a 100% donation policy as well as a self-funded research institute focused on highlighting the human rights violations committed by Israel and its global enablers.

SUMMARY:

1. This is a human rights issue
2. PUMA has been widely criticised for its four-year sponsorship (2018-2022) with the Israel Football Association (IFA) by a large number of NGOs and civic rights NGOs.
3. The IFA is a sports grouping that includes teams from Israel's illegal settlements, built on stolen Palestinian land in continuing violation of a litany of international laws
4. The IFA...has racially segregated part of its national children's league, incurring legal action. It has never once disciplined Beitar Jerusalem FC for that club's longstanding apparent ban on the hiring of Arab players, or taken serious action to curb the notorious anti-Arab violence of its supporters. (*Source: The Guardian*)
5. Hundreds of civil society groups including [UN advisers](#), [dozens of elected officials](#), [public figures](#) and [civil society and human rights NGOs](#) have repeatedly condemned IFA's complicity in Israel's illegal settlement enterprise.
6. PUMA PR machinery will claim sports is above politics but has said or done nothing to address the same issue of Palestinians living under Israel's brutal occupation that PUMA's sponsorship enables.
7. Palestinian athletes are surrounded by Israeli roadblocks, separation walls, segregated roads and settlements, continually subjected to humiliating military checkpoints while matches get interrupted and raided by armed soldiers and sports pitches shrink in size by ever-expanding illegal settlements. (*Source: Aljazeera*)
8. By sponsoring and thus, lending credibility to a name closely associated with the illegal occupation, PUMA in its association with the IFA has repeatedly chosen to stand shoulder to shoulder with a regime that has been widely condemned for oppressing against voiceless athletes and their families living under the illegal occupation of West Bank and East Jerusalem today.
9. PUMA's sponsorship of the IFA, and the international legitimacy that it callously grants, is nothing short of a tacit endorsement of Israel's expansion of illegal settlements (sports-washing Israel's system of oppression)
10. PUMA falsely claims to support human rights and labor rights yet, evidence suggest it egregiously supports a football association that is an apartheid enabler, to paraphrase reports by numerous human rights and civil society groups. **Either Israel is lying or Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and 2-3 dozens odd NGOs and human rights groups are.**

<https://thegazafund.com/global-human-rights-groups-critical-of-israel/>