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Alexandra Armas
CEO, Ladies European Tour
Via email

October 27, 2020

Dear Ms. Armas,

The Ladies European Tour (LET) announced on September 28 that it will hold two events in Saudi Arabia from November 12-19, 2020, which will be the first female professional golf competitions in the Kingdom.

I am writing to urgently inform you that, despite trumpeting more rights and freedoms for women, Saudi Arabia is viciously persecuting women's rights advocates and denying millions of Saudi women their basic rights and freedoms. I would like to clarify the strategy of Mohammed bin Salman (MBS)'s regime in investing in reputable organizations such as LET to whitewash its crimes and highlight how international sporting and entertainment events in the Kingdom have not led to significant "opening up" or let-up in the repression. As a result, I would like to request that your organization considers its opportunity to positively influence women's rights in Saudi Arabia and defend universal values by withdrawing from the two scheduled events.

LET's decision to hold these women's golf events in Saudi Arabia severely undermines LET's support of women's rights. For example, as a result of LET's compromise with Saudi authorities, female players will be prohibited from wearing skirts or shorts during the tournament.

Outside the confines of the tournament, Saudi women are treated like second-class citizens. They cannot fully and freely access education and healthcare services, get married, or exit prison without permission from a male relative. Worse, several Saudi women's rights activists, including Loujain al-Hathloul, Samar Badawi, Nassima al-Sadah, and Nouf Abdulaziz, are currently in prison for having peacefully campaigned against this male guardianship system, which enables a permanent violation of their human rights. They have been subjected to torture that includes — but is most certainly not limited to — electric shocks, flogging, sexual abuse, and prolonged solitary confinement.

Ms. Armas, holding this event in Saudi Arabia puts LET in league with people who respond to an individual's freedom of thought with torture and even murder. Saudi Arabia remains an absolute monarchy whose de facto dictator, MBS, brutally silences anyone who dares to criticize his policies or call for reform. The barbaric murder of *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi and the cover-up of the crime is perhaps the most brazen example of the extreme violence that

MBS exerts in order to silence his critics. The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnès Callamard, investigated the murder and concluded that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is irrefutably responsible for the crime, and called on corporations and organizations to “establish explicit policies to avoid entering into deals with businesses, business people, and organs of the State that have had a direct or indirect role in Khashoggi’s execution or other grave human rights violations.”

Furthermore, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights stipulate that businesses should “seek to prevent [...] adverse human rights impacts that they are directly linked to through their business relationships, even where they do not contribute to those impacts.” The ability of civil society to operate where you hold or participate in sports events is essential to upholding your credibility and avoiding any contribution or linkage to human rights violations.

Pro golfers have also echoed human rights concerns about playing in Saudi Arabia. In January 2020, English golfer Meghan MacLaren announced that she was withdrawing from the Saudi Ladies Tournament because of human rights concerns. “It’s obviously a huge tournament for us, but this to me is about more than golf. I wish sport as a whole looked through a lens deeper than what benefits itself.” A number of other golfers, including Rory McIlroy and Tiger Woods, have also declined to participate in golf tournaments in Saudi Arabia, noting their concerns about the abuse of human rights.

Your organization, the Ladies European Tour, has tremendous media influence. MBS hopes to use and manipulate that influence — as he repeatedly does with numerous organizations, music festivals, and business summits — to bolster his own reputation and regain credibility, both locally and abroad. Instead, we urge you and your organization to use your platform to advance human rights in Saudi Arabia and contribute to a mission of increasing global democratic freedoms.

Considering the information above, holding this competition in Saudi Arabia will be disastrous for the reputation of the Ladies European Tour, which has articulated a commitment to celebrating women’s rights and supporting local communities. The Human Rights Foundation implores you to urgently consider cancelling this event. We also urge LET to defend human rights and universal values by calling for the release of Saudi women’s rights advocates and all other citizens arbitrarily imprisoned for exercising freedom of expression.

Sincerely,



Garry Kasparov
Chairman, Human Rights Foundation