March 8, 2021

Dear Dr. Schormann,

Your organization, Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne (UIPM), is planning to host the 2021 Pentathlon and Laser Run World Championships in Cairo, Egypt on June 7-13, 2021. In addition, your organization is planning to host the Junior and Youth World Championships in Alexandria, Egypt on July 4-17, 2021.

UIPM previously selected Minsk, Belarus as the host city of the June Championships, but after pressure from Belarusian civil society groups, UIPM moved the event to Cairo. HRF commends your decision to move the Championships away from Belarus, which is currently in the midst of a brutal government crackdown on peaceful protesters, including many athletes. In a public statement, UIPM cited “instability” as the reason for the move, which was an indirect and feeble way of acknowledging the massive government repression in Belarus. Unfortunately, the decision to move the Championships from Belarus to Egypt only replaces one authoritarian country with another.

I am writing to urgently inform you of the human rights crisis in Egypt, and that el-Sisi’s regime is using the Pentathlon Championships merely to whitewash its most recent murderous repression, bolster its reputation, and regain credibility, both domestically and abroad. While HRF commends your recent decision to move this event, we respectfully request that you move this event and the Junior and Youth Championships to a democratic country and use your platform to galvanize support for communities in their courageous struggle for a country free of dictatorship, censorship, and repression.

Partnering with the brutal dictatorship of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt puts your organization in league with a murderous, repressive regime involved in gross human rights violations, including the jailing and oppression of women. UIPM asserts that its vision is to create a “sustainable and inclusive global environment that enables people of all ages, genders, religions, nationalities and social backgrounds to participate in multidisciplinary sport,” and lists “respect” and “inclusion” as its core values.

There is a vast gap between the values stated above and the reality on-the-ground in Egypt.

Egypt is run by a brutal military dictatorship. Since the military coup in 2013, several human rights groups have recorded over 3,000 extrajudicial killings, and over 60,000 arbitrary detentions. Children as young as 12 have been abducted and tortured in Egyptian prisons, while healthcare workers have been arrested for criticizing the government’s response to COVID-19.

Most concerning, however, is the government’s extensive campaign against women. Under the guise of vague “public morality” laws, women have been subjected to arrests and prosecution for posting videos and pictures of themselves online. In July
2020, two women, Haneen Hossam and Mawada el-Adham, were sentenced to two years in prison because of their TikTok careers. The government claimed they were “violating family values” and “inciting debauchery.” They became stars on TikTok, Instagram, and other social media platforms with harmless videos they posted of themselves dancing, lip-syncing and singing. Ms. Hossam’s sentence has recently been overturned, but Ms. el-Adham is still facing charges.

The past year has been an especially difficult time for human rights activists in Egypt. At the beginning of May 2020, el-Sisi’s regime approved an expansion of emergency law powers in response to the coronavirus pandemic, with the majority of new amendments having little or nothing to do with public health, but instead further consolidating el-Sisi’s power over every aspect of Egyptian citizens’ lives. Among these new amendments are provisions that allow el-Sisi to ban public and private gatherings, irrespective of a public health crisis, and control over the prices, ownership, transportation, and sale of goods.

These new laws have been followed by a crackdown on human rights groups. In November 2020, security forces arrested three senior staff members of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, one of the most prominent human rights organizations still operating in the country, including its executive director. The State Security Prosecutors leveled terror-related charges against them and ordered their pre-trial detention for 15 days.

Egypt is definitely not an environment that encourages respect for “all ages, genders, religions, nationalities and social backgrounds.” If you move forward with this event sponsored by el-Sisi’s dictatorship, you will be in league with a regime that has a well-documented record of brutalizing, jailing, and murdering its citizens, particularly women and human rights defenders.

Considering the information above, HRF believes that your support for an event sponsored by a murderous, repressive regime involved in gross human rights violations would be highly unfortunate and damaging to your brand.

Instead, we urge you to use your platform to promote human rights in Egypt and contribute to a mission of protecting freedom globally. Canceling the Championships in Egypt will prevent el-Sisi’s regime from whitewashing its crimes, perhaps with your unintentional support. Your organization’s influence in Egypt gives you the opportunity to make a hugely influential condemnation of el-Sisi’s regime, and to greatly enhance the cause of freedom in Egypt. You have the opportunity to call for the release of all arbitrarily detained citizens, and an end to police brutality, regime violence, intimidation, and censorship.

We hope you will consider showing consistency in your support for human rights and peaceful, democratic protests against the authoritarian regime in Egypt, by using this opportunity for good.

If you have any questions, you can contact me at (212) 246-8486 or by e-mail at info@hrf.org.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Thor Halvorssen
CEO and President
Human Rights Foundation