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HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

SUBMISSION TO THE 2009 OLYMPIC CONGRESS IN COPENHAGEN

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2009/02/23/human-rights-watch-submission-2009-olympic-congress>

THEME 3.2: GOOD GOVERNANCE AND ETHICS

Integrating Human Rights in the Olympic Process

Summary:

The human rights violations in China linked to Beijing’s hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games clearly showed the need for the International Olympic Committee to integrate human rights into its host country selection and monitoring procedures. Such reforms are essential ahead of the 2014 Sochi Games, since many of the rights concerns documented in the context of the Beijing Games are relevant for Russia. Human Rights Watch is calling for the creation of an IOC standing committee on human rights, which would help set and monitor human rights benchmarks related to media freedom, labor rights, freedom of expression and civil liberties—universal standards which already apply to all countries. This committee could also serve a vital function to further communication between the IOC and rights organizations or individuals who have human rights concerns. Human Rights Watch also urges that future Host City Contracts be made public.

Human Rights Watch’s contribution to the 2009 Olympic Congress concerns Theme 3.2, “good governance and ethics.”

The notion of “good governance” refers first to the International Olympic Committee, which must enforce the principles of the Olympic Charter including the “preservation of human dignity,” but also to the host country, which cannot adequately represent Olympic values if it violates basic human rights.

The notion of “ethics” is enshrined in the First Fundamental Principle of Olympism, according to which Olympism seeks to create “respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.” Any violation of human rights contravenes this principle.

1. CASE STUDY: THE BEIJING OLYMPICS

Human Rights Watch extensively documented four types of human rights violations related to China’s hosting of the 2008 Beijing Games:

- **Media censorship:** the Chinese government repeatedly violated its own pledges on media freedom, as documented in our reports *You Will Be Harassed and Detained* (August 2007) and *China's Forbidden Zones* (July 2008). Government censorship during the Olympics of news of a major public health threat—China's melamine-poisoned milk—contributed to the sickening of 294,000 children and the death of at least six infants.
- **Forced evictions of Chinese citizens:** to build Olympic venues in Beijing and other cities, thousands of Chinese citizens were forcibly evicted from their homes with practically no form of due process either in terms of consultation or compensation.
- **Abuse of migrant construction workers:** as documented in our report *One Year of My Blood*, many of the estimated one million migrant construction workers who built the Olympic venues faced insufficient and sometimes unpaid wages as well as hazardous working conditions, with few means of redress.
- **The silencing of civil society and rights activists:** the period leading up to the Beijing Games was marred by the jailings or house arrests of activists who had specifically criticized the Olympics (including Sakharov Prize winner Hu Jia), and of Chinese citizens who had officially applied for the right to protest in one of the protest zones set up by the Chinese government itself.

The image of the Olympic Movement also suffered a serious setback in March 2008, when the Chinese government violently cracked down on protests in Tibet, leading to massive protests in major cities on the Torch Relay itinerary.

A complete description of rights abuses in China in the context of the Beijing Games can be found here: <http://china.hrw.org/>

2. HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN RUSSIA AND THE SOCHI 2014 OLYMPICS

Many of the human rights concerns Human Rights Watch documented in China are relevant for Russia and could impede Russia's ability to host the 2014 Winter Olympics with full respect for human dignity and good governance. The Russian government uses restrictive laws to harass and close non-governmental organizations, has effectively stifled political opposition and civil society, and restricts and censors the media. Outspoken journalists and human rights defenders risk not only harassment, but, in some cases, murder. In January, a prominent human rights lawyer was assassinated together with a *Novaya Gazeta* journalist. The Committee to Protect Journalists ranked Russia as the world's third deadliest country for reporters for 1992-2008, during which 49 Russian journalists were killed.

Like China, Russia relies heavily on migrant construction workers. As documented in Human Rights Watch's report "[Are You Happy to Cheat Us?](http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/02/09/are-you-happy-cheat-us-0)" (www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/02/09/are-you-happy-cheat-us-0), many workers suffer violations including withheld wages, physical abuse, hazardous working conditions, and in the worst instances, forced labor. Given the scale of construction planned for the Sochi Games, it is essential to ensure effective protection for the workers who are already being recruited for construction of Olympic venues and other facilities.

Sochi's proximity to the Georgian border and to Chechnya may also increase the risk that the Russian government will harshly repress any form of dissent prior to the Olympics.

3. PROPOSAL FOR AN IOC COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

In order to address Olympics-related human rights violations in all future host countries, Human Rights Watch submitted to the International Olympic Committee in January 2008 a plan for the creation of an IOC standing committee on human rights, or similar mechanism to monitor human rights in host countries. Such a committee would help set and apply human rights benchmarks for potential Olympic hosts. These standards would be included in the IOC Model Candidature for Olympic host countries. We also recommend that future Host City Contracts be made public. This committee could also serve a vital function as a liaison between the IOC and rights organizations or individuals on human rights issues.

The proposed committee would monitor the host country's adherence to specific human rights benchmarks, including:

a) Media freedom benchmarks

- Granting of media freedom (to domestic and foreign journalists, as well as Internet reporters), in accordance with the Olympic Charter;
- Establishment of a mechanism for journalists to file complaints, for example on the IOC's website;
- Ensuring freedom of movement for journalists covering the country during the Olympics.

b) Labor rights benchmarks

- Establishment of an independent commission to investigate and report on labor-related abuses relating to Olympics venues;
- Full disclosure of all labor disputes, workplace injuries and deaths on construction sites for Olympic venues;

c) Freedom of expression and association benchmarks

- Granting of full freedom of expression and association to rights activists, other citizens or organizations expressing peaceful criticism of the host country;
- Authorization of peaceful demonstration during the Olympic Games, in accordance with international norms of freedom of assembly.

d) Civil liberties benchmarks

- Ban on any forced evictions of host city residents, without due compensation and right of appeal, to make way for the construction of Olympic venues;
- Ban on any "sweeps," i.e. forcible removal from the host city of "undesirable" citizens such as rights activists or others (e.g. rural petitioners in the case of the Beijing Games).
