Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2608 (2025)[1]

The Olympic Movement and peacekeeping: is sport neutrality serving sport values?

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Sport and the Olympic Movement can play an essential role in preserving peace and promoting internationally recognised human rights standards and democracy. The Parliamentary Assembly commends the central role of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in bringing together key stakeholders in the global sports arena to achieve these goals, while seeking to overcome differences.

2. The neutrality and autonomy of sport should enable sports institutions to fulfil their mission and safeguard sporting values effectively, without fear of undue pressure or interference. While the complex and ever-evolving relationships between the State and sports bodies, at both national and international levels, blur the clear separation between politics and sport, the Assembly believes that these two fundamental principles must be recognised and duly respected by public authorities and that the sports movement should assume the responsibilities deriving from them. However, these principles must be properly understood and implemented in accordance with the above-mentioned goals and values of the Olympic Movement.

3. The Assembly acknowledges that the Olympic Charter refers to the respect for internationally recognised human rights, but their significance is not always sufficiently emphasised by the sports governing bodies and, despite the many statements and declarations, their protection in practice and their enforcement still lack consistency and effectiveness.

4. The principles of neutrality and autonomy of sport should serve peace and champion democratic principles and human rights; they cannot justify inertia or wavering reactions when peace, democracy and human rights are threatened, vilified or *de facto* denied.

5. The Assembly points out that, while the Olympic Charter has constitutional significance and value for the sports movement, it is not superior to international conventions and treaties: the obligation to fully respect international human rights standards must take precedence over the need to ensure the political neutrality of sport, and the concept of autonomy of sport does not shield sports organisations from accountability when they fail to protect human dignity and human rights.

6. The Assembly wishes to encourage the Olympic Movement and the IOC to strengthen the link between sport and humanitarian law and, in particular, to reinforce the collective commitment to fostering a peaceful and co-operative global environment during the Olympic Games. Any country engaged in active warfare or armed conflict must commit to at least a temporary cessation of hostilities for the duration of the Olympic Games and must be held immediately accountable for any violation of the Olympic Truce.

7. Participation in the Olympic Games and other major sports competitions, the hosting of these events and the celebration of the victories of national teams and athletes are used by some governments as a means of asserting their power and gaining influence and prestige to consolidate this power. This approach negates the very idea of the neutrality of sport. The Assembly firmly condemns any martial attitude towards sport which seeks to publicly demonstrate economic and political supremacy alongside sporting primacy, and even to present autocratic forms of government as an alternative to democratic governance, which is incompatible with the values enshrined in the Olympic Charter.

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1. *Assembly debate* on 25 June 2025 (23rd sitting) (see Doc. 16185, report of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Mr Mogens Jensen). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 25 June 2025 (23rd sitting).

8. To avoid this approach, sports governing bodies cannot solely rely on the national Olympic committees, especially when they do not appear to be autonomous but under government control. Increased scrutiny and the establishment of an independent monitoring system are essential to strengthen the IOC's ability to gather information on the actual respect for the values it proclaims.

9. Athletes are key players and powerful allies in the implementation of the Olympic Charter and its values; they must abide by political neutrality, but this principle and the sport regulations enacted to ensure that it is observed must not prevent them from supporting peace or condemning human rights violations and cannot justify punishing athletes for doing so.

10. Neither democratic governments or international organisations, nor athletes or sports governing bodies can remain silent and passive, in the name of the neutrality and autonomy of sport, when faced with serious human rights violations.

11. The Assembly agrees that athletes should not be held responsible for their governments' behaviour and that the right of athletes to participate in sports competitions must be preserved as far as possible. However, if a government seriously violates the Olympic principles and values of sport, the athletes of that country should only be allowed to participate in the Olympic Games or major sporting events organised by international sports federations as neutral athletes under the Olympic banner.

12. In addition, exceptional circumstances may require stronger measures, including a total ban on athletes from a given country. This should be the case when, on the one hand, such a ban is necessary to protect other human rights which may override the right of individual athletes to participate in sporting events and when, on the other hand, it is practically impossible for the athletes concerned to dissociate themselves from the actions of their governments, including because their right to freely express criticism is denied by their countries' authoritarian and repressive regimes.

13. This is the case in the Russian Federation and Belarus, where not only are virtually all high-level athletes State employees and/or financially supported by the State, but also where there is no freedom of expression and where taking a stand against the government would put an athlete at risk of losing their profession, livelihood and social status, and even being imprisoned. Moreover, in these countries, sport is clearly a soft power tool for the government and is being misused to generate acceptance of, if not support for, the war of aggression against Ukraine, notwithstanding the appalling massive human rights violations and clear threat to the international legal order that this war has unleashed.

14. In light of the above, the Assembly calls on the International Olympic Committee to:

14.1. reinforce the provisions of the Olympic Charter which commit the IOC and its members to respecting and protecting human dignity and internationally recognised human rights;

14.2. establish the Olympic Truce as a necessary condition for a country's participation in the Olympic Games and include, in the Olympic Charter and other relevant IOC regulations, the necessary provisions to effectively enforce the obligation to respect this truce;

14.3. introduce, in the Olympic Charter, a provision stating that a martial attitude to sport is incompatible with Olympism and sporting values, and reinforce the obligation of national sports institutions, particularly the national Olympic committees, to operate under conditions of strict independence and autonomy;

14.4. set up, in co-operation with human rights organisations, a robust monitoring system, such as an independent commission supported by independent experts, with investigative powers to evaluate and condemn human rights violations and infringements of sporting values within the Olympic Movement, including the manipulative use of sport by a government;

14.5. amend Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter to specify that political neutrality does not prevent athletes from supporting peace or condemning human rights violations.

15. With a view to strengthening the rule of law within the Olympic Movement and the IOC, the Assembly recommends the establishment of an independent and impartial sports judicial body to ensure the consistent interpretation and implementation of the Olympic Charter and its fundamental principles by all sports governing bodies.

16. Finally, the Assembly trusts that the IOC and its newly elected president are firmly committed to promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms and to placing sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind with a view to promoting a peaceful society. In this context, the Assembly

welcomes the IOC as an institutional partner of the newly established Parliamentary Alliance for Good Governance and Integrity in Sport, and invites the IOC to consider entering into a memorandum of understanding with the Council of Europe.