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May 12, 2015

Patrick Hickey
President, European Olympic Committees
Olympic House
Harbour Road, Howth
Dublin
Ireland

Dear Mr. Hickey,

Thank you for the informative meeting in Dublin on April 30, 2015. We are writing to you today in advance of the European Olympic Committees Executive Committee Meeting on May 14. We urge you to use the meeting to take a number of crucial decisions ahead of the 2015 European Games in Baku to ensure that the EOC fulfills its mandate to uphold the Olympic Charter's commitments to human dignity, press freedom, and placing sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind.

As we discussed in our meeting, in the last year alone, the government has detained and prosecuted dozens of journalists, independent activists, and political activists on false criminal charges. Several of them have been sentenced to long prison sentences. The [CPI letter](#) hand-delivered to President Hickey details the cases of [eight journalists](#) behind bars and identifies other specific media freedom issues that, should they remain unaddressed before the start of the European Games, would violate fundamental principles of the Olympic Charter by which the European Olympic Committees are governed. The government of Azerbaijan has also opened investigations into, raided, and closed dozens of independent media outlets and independent groups. An annex to this letter, first sent by Human Rights Watch to the EOC in January 2015, provides additional detail on these human rights

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concerns. We also encourage you to review [Human Rights Watch's](#) and [CPI's](#) extensive reporting on Azerbaijan.

In light of these grave concerns, we urge you and other members of the Executive Committee to whom we are writing to insist that the EOC take the following steps in advance of the European Games Opening Ceremonies on June 12:

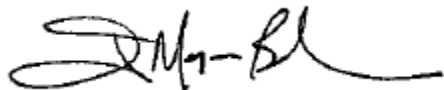
- Issue a public statement expressing EOCs' strong and unequivocal support for human rights, press freedom, and freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.
- Privately and publicly insist that the government of Azerbaijan release unconditionally all journalists and activists behind bars on politically motivated charges. These should include, but not be limited to: Khadija Ismayilova, Leyla Yunus, Arif Yunus, Intigam Aliyev, Rasul Jafarov, Rauf Mirgadirov, Anar Mammadli, Ilgar Mammadov, Tofiq Yagulblu, as well as the additional journalists identified [in the CPI letter](#).
- Urge the Azerbaijani authorities to halt any ongoing prosecutions and refrain from initiating further politically motivated arrests, prosecutions, harassment and other actions against independent journalists, activists, and civil society groups, and allow them to carry out their legitimate work without interference.
- Establish a standing mechanism within the EOC whereby journalists covering the European Games in Baku (and subsequent European Games) may file complaints regarding any restrictions on their ability to cover a wide range of topics not only related to sport but also to social, political, and other issues in the host country.

We encourage you to use your prominent role within the European Olympic Committees to guarantee a positive legacy from the first-ever European Games and ensuring that they are not stained by severe violations of press freedoms and human rights that contravene the spirit and the letter of the Olympic Charter. Securing the freedom of unjustly imprisoned journalists and activists, halting the

government's prosecutions of critics, and ensuring full press freedom are essential for a positive outcome of these games.

Thank you for your prompt attention to these concerns and for using your leadership role as a force for good in the Olympic movement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane Buchanan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jane Buchanan
Associate Director, Europe and Central Asia
Human Rights Watch

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nina Ognianova', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nina Ognianova
Europe and Central Asia Program Coordinator
Committee to Protect Journalists