



International  
Olympic  
Committee

Corporate and Sustainable Development  
Department

Public

Andrea Florence  
Director  
Sport & Rights Alliance

Lausanne, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2024

### **Response to your letter addressing the hijab bans in French sports**

Dear Ms Andrea Florence,

We thank you for your letter dated 24<sup>th</sup> May, addressed to IOC President Thomas Bach.

At the Olympic Games, the IOC rules and the technical rules of the International Federations (IFs) apply. Athletes are free to wear a hijab, veil and headscarf in the Olympic Village and in Olympic venues. During competitions, the technical rules set by the relevant IFs apply. In some sports, restrictions on attire, including but not limited to the hijab, veil and headscarf, are in place for safety and technical reasons.

With regard to the applicable IOC rules, the Olympic Charter states very clearly: “The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Olympic Charter shall be secured without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

While this principle applies within the remit of the Olympic Movement, outside this remit, athletes are also acting in accordance with their national context. Freedom of religion is interpreted in many different ways by sovereign states. This is reflected in national approaches to sport, too. In practice, the wearing of the hijab, veil or headscarf is highly debated in many countries. This covers countries where the wearing of the hijab, veil or headscarf is mandatory, countries where it is optional and countries where it is prohibited.

In France, elite athletes competing for French national teams are considered civil servants. This means that they must respect the principles of secularism and neutrality, which, according to French law, means prohibition from wearing outwardly religious

symbols, including the hijab, veil and headscarf when they are acting in their official capacity and on official occasions as members of the French national team. The same secular approach also applies, for instance, to civil servants and teachers.

When the IOC learned, some time ago, about this situation, it contacted the National Olympic Committee of France in order to understand if any athletes would be impacted with regard to the Olympic Games Paris 2024. It was informed that the approach in French elite sport is based on French legal and normative constraints and the particular view in France on secularism. After further consultation, it appears that the only case concerning an athlete qualified for the Olympic Games Paris 2024 has been resolved to the satisfaction of everyone.

The IOC also learned about the situation in some French federations with regard to grassroots sport. In this context, the IOC refers to the relevant French laws and jurisprudence and the recent decision of the Council of State. Last year, it rejected an appeal by a group of athletes, and ruled that the hijab ban by the French Football Federation (FFF), which also applies in grassroots sport, was “appropriate and proportionate”. It reiterated that sports federations are responsible for determining “the rules for participation in their sporting events and competitions, including those relating to dress and equipment, in order to ensure safety of the players and compliance with the rules of the game” and added that the FFF was entitled to issue the ban “in order to ensure the smooth running of football matches and avoid any conflicts”.

The IOC refers you to the French Ministry of Sport for further questions.

With warm wishes,

Magali Martowicz

Head of Human Rights