



Gianni Infantino, President of FIFA

Brussels, 10 September 2016

Subject: Football clubs in Israeli settlements

Dear President Infantino,

We are Members of the European Parliament who believe that sports play a key role in the global promotion of peace and respect for human rights. We write to you regarding the issue of football clubs in Israeli settlements that is currently on FIFA's agenda and is supposed to be discussed at the FIFA Council meeting on 13-14 October.

As you know, there are at least five Israeli football clubs in West Bank settlements that play in the Israeli football league. However, the West Bank is part of the occupied Palestinian territory, which falls under the Palestinian Football Association. The settlement clubs, therefore, clearly violate FIFA's Statutes, according to which clubs from one member association cannot play on the territory of another member association without its and FIFA's consent.

The participation of the settlement clubs in the Israeli league is also inconsistent with existing precedents. In 2014, following Russia's occupation of Crimea, UEFA quickly ruled that Crimean football clubs cannot play in the Russian league. There is no reason to apply a more lenient policy towards the Israeli settlement clubs.

Supporting the settlement clubs is also incompatible with FIFA's newly strengthened commitment to respect and promote human rights. As amply documented by the United Nations, the expansion of settlements leads to widespread violations of human rights, including confiscation of Palestinians' land, demolition of their homes and restrictions on their movement.

The European Union's position, widely shared internationally, is that the settlements are "illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-state solution impossible." The international consensus is that the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is an "occupied Palestinian territory," not a disputed territory. The EU as well as the United States routinely exclude settlements from their cooperation programmes and agreements with Israel – and FIFA should do the same.

We urge you to act in accordance with FIFA Statutes, international law, the existing precedents and FIFA's human rights commitments. On this basis, FIFA should rule that settlement clubs either fully relocate within Israel's internationally recognised borders or are excluded from the Israeli Football Association.

Excluding or relocating the few settlement clubs will not harm football in Israel itself. On the contrary, it will secure Israel's position in FIFA. Meanwhile, until the question of Israeli settlements is politically

resolved, their residents will be able to continue playing football either in Israel proper or in the settlements outside FIFA structures.

President Infantino, upon your election to the helm of FIFA, you vowed to “put football first.” We fully agree and do not want politics to get in the way of the sport. We want to see football thrive in both Israel and Palestine. To that end, FIFA must not let football be an instrument of territorial expansion. Football must be played by the agreed-upon rules, also in the Middle East. That is the only way to ensure fair play and the integrity of sport.

One year ago, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on FIFA to undertake fundamental reforms and abandon its opaque and corrupt practices.¹ The issue of settlement clubs is a test of FIFA’s seriousness about its renewal as a transparent and accountable organisation.

Yours sincerely,

Members of the European Parliament:

Alyn Smith MEP, ..., ...

Cc:

Tokyo Sexwale, Chair of the FIFA Israel-Palestine Monitoring Committee

FIFA Vice-Presidents and FIFA Secretary-General

European members of the FIFA Council

UEFA President, Vice-Presidents and Secretary-General

EU Commissioner for Sport, Mr. Navracsics

¹ [“European Parliament resolution on recent revelations on high-level corruption cases in FIFA,”](#) 11 June 2015.