

Athleten Deutschland e.V.  
Friedbergstraße 19  
14057 Berlin  
E-mail: [presse@athleten-deutschland.org](mailto:presse@athleten-deutschland.org)  
[www.athleten-deutschland.org](http://www.athleten-deutschland.org)

## **The IOC Must Distance Itself from Open Threat and Protect Athletes' Freedom of Expression**

**Berlin, January 20, 2022.** According to the Washington Post, a member of the Chinese organizing committee [has threatened](#) foreign athletes that "*any behavior or speech that is against the Olympic spirit, especially against the Chinese laws and regulations, are also subject to certain punishment.*"

This open threat against athletes frightens and worries us. It expresses what has long been suspected: Athletes' freedom of expression during the Games is not guaranteed at this point. We fear that expressions of opinion will be met with reprisals and disadvantages.

Maximilian Klein, Representative for International Sport Policy: "*The IOC and the host country China will gladly use the athletes' images for their purposes. However, they will not allow athletes to decide for themselves whether and how they want to leverage their platform and audience as part of their freedom of expression. We expect the IOC to clearly distance itself from the statements made by the Beijing Organising Committee. It must nail its colors to the mast and protect the athletes.*"

The IOC must explain how it will safeguard the athletes' rights and ensure their protection. A transparent procedure is also needed to resolve the existing uncertainty about the consequences and risks of possible expressions of opinion, and thus to take pressure off athletes. For example, it remains unclear what the [official IOC guidelines on Rule 50](#) imply in the Chinese context when athletes are supposed to respect the "*applicable laws*" when expressing their views.

Due to the recent threat by the organizing committee, there are considerable doubts as to whether the participants will receive adequate protection. The risk of expressing views during the Games is difficult to assess. For this reason, it is understandable and reasonable for athletes to refrain from expressing themselves out of pure self-protection.

However, we believe that athletes should have freedom of choice. All those who wish to speak out on issues of their choice within the framework of human rights should have this opportunity. To do so, they must be provided with safe conditions and not fear reprisals. We explained this position in [our statement on the relaxation of Rule 50.2](#).

Time and again in the run-up to the Games, we [have stated and emphasized](#) that the IOC must fulfill its human rights due diligence obligations and present a human rights risk analysis for the Games. It must also demonstrate what steps it is taking to mitigate these human rights risks. So

far, the IOC has not sufficiently fulfilled this responsibility.

Furthermore, it is known that written assurances on the adherence to human rights and thus on freedom of expression [were made prior to the 2015 award decision](#). The IOC must publish these assurances before the Games and explain how compliance with them will be ensured and monitored.

The IOC should now do everything possible to restore trust and credibly fulfill its duties of care. In light of the recent revelations of [IT security vulnerabilities](#) and open threats against athletes, we cannot see a credible change of course at this time.

#### About Athleten Deutschland e.V.:

Athleten Deutschland was founded in 2017 to give Germany's elite athletes a real say for the first time. The association is committed to fundamentally change the German and international sporting system. Our focus is to represent, protect and empower our members.

We fight for working conditions which allow our members to fulfil their full potential as athletes and human beings alike. We stand for fair and clean sport, free from abuse and violence, manipulation, and mismanagement. To fulfil our mission, we collaborate with various stakeholders from politics, business, science, and civil society, as well as like-minded partners in Europe and around the world.



Athletes Germany is funded by the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community based on a resolution of the German Bundestag.