SAMPLE LETTER TO THE NATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE

Date

Dear (NAME OF CHAIR OR PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE),

I am writing to you on behalf of (NAME) to draw your attention to attempts by some National Olympic Committees (NOCs) to inhibit the freedom of expression rights of athletes who are competing in the Beijing Olympics.

It has been reported that some NOCs have placed restrictions on athletes’ rights to free speech. They have justified this under Article 51(3) of the International Olympic Charter, which states: “No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas.”

We are appealing to the ( ) Olympic Committee to respect and protect the athletes right to freedom of expression by issuing a clear statement to our athletes explaining that statements regarding human rights fall outside the scope of Article 51(3) of the Olympic Charter.

We are sensitive to the need to avoid the Olympics being used as a political platform for the promotion of religious propaganda or racism. However, it is our belief that preventing athletes from discussing human rights abuses is a violation of their basic human right to freedom of expression. This in turn is a violation of the fundamental principles at the very heart of the Olympic Charter. Not only does this contradict the spirit of the games, but it also contributes to the condoning of human rights abuses committed by many countries around the world, including China.

It is important to stress that exposure to human rights issues in no way constitutes political propaganda. Human rights are apolitical, universal and indivisible, and belong to every human being, regardless of nationality, age, gender and race. Repressive governments have often, in their attempts to avoid criticism, accused those who advocate in favor of respect for human rights — whether they are journalists, academics, human rights activists or athletes — of engaging in political activities. We hope and assume that you, the ( )OCs and the Olympic Movement as a whole will not participate in this distortion.

(NAME) is part of a large body of individuals, organisations and even States who see the Olympics as an opportunity to promote greater respect for human rights in a non-political atmosphere. This is not only consistent with, but indeed flows from the Fundamental Principles of The Olympics and their commitment to human dignity. It would be a tremendous shame for the Olympic Games if the leading Olympic bodies, including the ( ) Olympic Committee, failed to support, or even worse obstructed, this possibility.

Sincerely,