

## **Olympians call on the Canadian Olympic Committee to reverse its position of support for the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes at the Olympic Games**

**March 8, 2023:** As a unified collective of Canadian Olympians, we call on the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC) to withdraw their support for the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes at the Olympic Games.

We condemn recent public statements issued by the COC supporting the “exploration of a pathway” for Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete as ‘neutrals’ in the 2024 Paris Olympics. Opening the door to ‘neutral’ Russian and Belarussian participation — and by doing so walking back the sanctions that have been in place since the start of the war — sends a message that the COC is no longer concerned with Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine. Recent remarks by COC officials endorsing conditions for ‘neutrality’ such as proving “they’re opposed to the war” or not “tied to the Russian military” are unfounded and out of touch. For example, it is illegal in Russia to publicly denounce military actions abroad, and virtually impossible for high-profile athletes not to support the war.

As demonstrated in PyeongChang 2018 and Tokyo 2020 by “Olympic Athletes from Russia” and the “Russian Olympic Committee”, separation of athlete from state is an impossible task. The ‘neutral team’ at an Olympic Games, while convenient for administrators and decisionmakers, is a fallacy.

Russia’s invasion and ongoing war in Ukraine has killed and wounded hundreds of thousands, displaced millions, and violated international human rights laws through indiscriminate shelling of civilian homes, hospitals, and schools. The atrocities of this war are inextricably tied to sport — the Beijing 2022 Games helped set the stage for and dictated the timing of the initial invasion, sports facilities in Ukraine have been targeted by Russian attacks, and Russian athletes have been elevated to high-ranking military positions and used in war propaganda. The global community has responded to the war with shock, outrage, and horror while coming together to support the citizens and government of Ukraine. Sanctions have been levied, and Russia has rightfully been denied the honour of competing for national pride on the world’s sporting stages. Refusing their participation in international sport is not simply a matter of denying athletes a chance to compete because of their passport, it is a rejection of an unlawful and inhumane war and a recognition of the role international sport plays in geopolitics.

As powerful and influential as the IOC is, the Canadian Olympic Committee remains an independent entity with a moral obligation to respect basic human rights. Anything less is inconsistent with both the Canadian government and the Canadian public’s opposition to this war.

We call on the COC to demonstrate leadership promoting the unifying values of peace, democracy, and equality. No pathway should be considered for Russian or Belarusian athletes to compete in the Olympic Games, until Russia fully withdraws from Ukraine.

As leaders in the international world of sport, we call on the COC to recognize and publicly support this position.

As signed by the following Canadian Olympians:

Alex Bilodeau  
Alex Harvey  
Beckie Scott  
Brendan Green  
Carol Huynh  
Chandra Crawford  
Christine Nesbitt  
Clara Hughes  
David Ford  
Devon Kershaw  
Drew Goldsack  
Duff Gibson  
Georgia Simmerling  
Gil Junio  
Hayley Wickenheiser  
Helen Upperton  
Jane Thornton  
Jayna Hefford  
Jenn Heil  
Jenn Kish  
Kaillie Humphries  
Kelly Vanderbeek  
Kristina Groves  
Larry Cain  
Leah Pells  
Meagan Duhamel  
Melissa Bishop  
Michael Barry  
Mike Janyk  
Milaine Theriault  
Perdita Felicien  
Roddy Ward  
Rosanna Crawford  
Sara Renner  
Sarah Wells  
Steph Labbe  
Tabia Charles  
Tessa Virtue  
Thomas Grandi  
Scott Frandsen  
Jesse Lumsden  
Ghislaine Landry