

Open Letter to the President of the International Olympic Committee

Kirsty Coventry

Lausanne, Switzerland

Date: October 3, 2025

Subject: Request to End and Prevent Future Use of AIN Status in International Sport

Dear President Coventry,

I address you today in my capacity as President of the European Weightlifting Federation (EWF), and more broadly, as a strong believer in the fundamental values of the Olympic Movement: neutrality, inclusivity, and the unifying power of sport above all political and ideological divides.

Over recent months, I have received communications from various European national federations expressing concern and seeking clarity regarding the continued use of the "AIN" (Individual Neutral Athlete) status for Russian and Belarusian athletes. Questions about consistency and impartiality have arisen, especially after the recent Paralympics decision and the calls for Israel to receive similar consideration due to ongoing military conflicts. This situation underscores the importance of clear and consistent application of principles in international sport.

While I understand the complexities that led to this decision, in line with the principles of non-retroactivity and since there is no current breach of the Olympic Truce, I respectfully urge the International Olympic Committee to reconsider its continuation. If the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) is deemed to have violated the Olympic Charter by incorporating regional sports organisations from territories internationally recognized as part of Ukraine, then any sanctions should be directed specifically at the responsible decision-makers within the ROC. Athletes, who have no authority over political or administrative actions taken by their NOC, should not bear the consequences of such decisions.

The principle of individual responsibility must apply; athletes should be judged on their own conduct and eligibility, not on the political actions of NOC officials. Hence, the application of neutral status, particularly when not based on individual violations but on national circumstances, sets a precedent that threatens the foundational principles of the Olympic Movement: neutrality, universality, and the unifying power of sport.

Peoples and conflicts unfortunately continue to exist in various regions around the globe, we must recognize that sport always had the potential to be something greater, a platform where

people from opposing sides can meet not as enemies, but as equals; where the focus is not on political divisions, but on human achievement, effort, and mutual respect. And if we continue down a path where geopolitical events dictate athletic participation, we risk fragmenting the very foundation upon which the Olympic spirit stands.

As President of a continental federation, I feel a deep responsibility to promote unity in our sport. I come from the Republic of Kosovo, a country that is not politically recognized by either Russia or Belarus. Yet, it was through the unifying power of sport that our judoka Majlinda Kelmendi was able to compete, and the flag of Kosovo was proudly raised in the heart of Russia, with even Russian guards saluting it (hand on forehead) when the anthem played. This moment serves as a powerful reminder that sport rises above political divisions.

Hence, everyone knows my strong stance that Sport is Above Politics, and I want all athletes, regardless of nationality, background, or the politics of their governments, to have the opportunity to participate fully and equally. When sport remains inclusive, it becomes a powerful tool for peace. When it becomes selective based on political circumstances, it risks losing that power.

The Olympic Charter explicitly calls on us to "place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society." This ideal cannot be realized if sport becomes a tool of political sanction. On the contrary, our role is to ensure that, regardless of political disagreements or military conflicts, athletes retain their right to compete under the banner of peace, unity, and mutual respect.

Therefore, I call not only for the lifting of the current AIN designation for Russian and Belarusian athletes, but also for the IOC to firmly and publicly commit to never applying such a status again, to any country, under any circumstance.

By restoring full participation rights and safeguarding them for the future, we protect the Olympic legacy and ensure that sport continues to serve as a powerful bridge for peace and understanding. Lifting these restrictions would not be a political act, it would be a reaffirmation of the Olympic values we all stand for. It would send a strong message: that **Sport is Above Politics** and will not be divided by the conflicts of the world but will remain a powerful force that brings the world together.

With sincere respect,

Dr. Astrit Hasani, President

European Weightlifting Federation (EWF)