

D Angel M^a Villar
Real Federación Española de Fútbol
President

May 7th, 2013

Dear Sir,

In June 2011, 42 Palestinian football clubs called on UEFA President Michel Platini to reverse the decision to hold the 2013 men's Under 21 championships in Israel, a country imposing military occupation, colonisation and an apartheid system in Palestine.

Since that time, throughout Europe and across the world, calls for UEFA to remove the Under 21 finals from Israel have increased steadily. From online petitions totalling over 13000 signatures, to a statement by 50 European football stars, to a letter from former French Minister of Sport Marie-George Buffet, it is clear that fans of the game and human rights alike regard granting Israel the honour of hosting a world class sporting event as an undeserved reward for behaviour contrary to sporting values.

A Europe-wide coalition of anti-racist organisations is campaigning to show the **Red Card** to Israel for flouting international law and infringing Palestinian human rights. The campaign challenges UEFA's decision to hold sporting competitions in Israel and works to ensure that sport's positive potential is used to pressure Israel to end its abuses of human rights rather than to encourage them through impunity and rewards. The campaign is part of the global BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement launched by Palestinian civil society in 2005, which draws inspiration from the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa where sports boycotts played a decisive role.

In September 2010, UEFA President Michel Platini expressed concern over Israeli restrictions imposed on Palestinian football players, stating that *"Israel must choose between allowing Palestinian sport to continue and prosper or be forced to face the consequences for their behaviour."*

Since then, football and other sports installations, including the headquarters of the Palestinian national paralympic committee and the national stadium in Gaza have been the targets of Israeli attacks. Israeli bombardment of schoolyards and playgrounds has resulted in the deaths of schoolchildren, killed while playing football.

It took three months of hunger strike and an international outcry for the Israeli authorities to release Palestinian national team player **Mahmoud Sarsak** last July. He had been arrested on his way from Gaza to a West Bank match and **held for three years without charge or trial**. Even now Israel holds Olympic squad goalkeeper Omar Abu Rois and Ramallah player Mohammed Nimr in detention, among 4,000 Palestinian political prisoners.

As with all Palestinians, Israel routinely denies the right to freedom of movement to Palestinian football players, whether within the occupied Palestinian territories or attempting to travel abroad to train or compete. Moreover, if UEFA were to go ahead with the ill-conceived plan of holding the Under 21 Championships in Israel, many thousands of

Palestinian football fans from the territories Israel illegally occupies would be denied entry to watch the games, while Israeli settlers would be free to come and go unhindered.

Adding insult to injury, the venues chosen for the Under 21 finals in Israel include: Bloomfield Stadium, formerly Basa, from which the Palestinian club Shabab el-Arab was expelled in 1948, Netanya Municipal Stadium which looms over the last remaining building of the destroyed Palestinian village of Bayyarat Hannun, a reserve stadium at Ramat Gan built on land seized under the “absentee property” laws from the Palestinian towns of Jarisha and al-Jammasin al-Sharqi and Teddy Stadium built beside the almost entirely destroyed Palestinian town of al-Maliha.

Teddy Stadium is also the home of the infamous Israeli team Beitar Jerusalem, whose fans torched the club’s administrative building in February 2013 following the addition of two Muslim players from Chechnya and a month later walked out when one scored his first goal. Moshe Zimmermann, a sports historian at Hebrew University, refutes claims that Beitar Jerusalem fans are merely an extremist fringe group, stating, *“The fact is that the Israeli society on the whole is getting more racist, or at least more ethnocentric, and this is an expression.”*

The Europe-wide **Red Card** campaign maintains that Israel must indeed be *“forced to face the consequences”*. The abuses mentioned above render it unfit to host international sporting events. Allowing it to do so reinforces the sense of impunity that perpetuates them.

We call on UEFA to withdraw the honour of hosting the 2013 European Under 21 championship from Israel and to exclude Israel from consideration for any future sporting events, sending a strong message that the systematic denial of human rights has no place in football.

The BDS Sports boycott campaign in the Spanish state kindly requests an interview to discuss all the above and calls on the Spanish football federation not to support the celebration of the mens Under 21 football championship in Israel thereby sending a clear message to the Israeli state that sporting values are inseparable from the respect for human rights.