



Culture, Media and Sport Committee

20 January 2025

**The Rt. Hon. Lisa Nandy MP,
Secretary of State,
Department for Culture, Media and Sport**

By email

Dear Lisa,

The Taliban's gross violations of women's and girls' rights and erasure of both from public life in Afghanistan has not stopped international sports bodies from allowing Taliban-backed male athletes to take part in competitions, often alongside the UK, and often at the expense of their body's own rules. This only legitimises the Taliban at home and on a global stage and is completely at odds with our principles as a country.

As you will know, Parliamentarians from across both Houses have signed a letter, instigated by Tonia Antoniazzi MP, to the England and Wales Cricket Board urging them to boycott their International Cricket Council (ICC) Champions Trophy match against Afghanistan next month, a position supported by more than half of the public¹. The letter highlights that the ICC is in direct contravention of its own rules, which require memberships nations to support and fund women's cricket. While the Afghanistan's men's team are still allowed to play internationally, the Afghan women's team, who faced persecution and were forced to flee when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 2021, are not. The ICC has even ignored pleas from the Afghan women's team to recognise them as a refugee team.

It is welcome that the Prime Minister called on cricket's global governing body to take a lead at last week's PMQs, but this is not enough. The ICC are not alone in acting contrary to their founding principles. FIFA's statutes state that the organisation shall "strive to promote the protection" of human rights; it says it is "committed to delivering tournaments that are inclusive and free from discrimination". Yet, it too ignores the pleas from the exiled Afghan women's team to officially recognise their players. All the while, the men's team continue to play unchallenged.

Without official recognition from international sporting bodies such as the ICC and FIFA, the Afghan women's teams are barred from competing in professional sporting events, they cannot represent their country or receive funding to support their players.

¹ <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/sport/survey-results/daily/2025/01/08/19bb8/1>



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In 2024, the International Olympic Committee worked to field a gender equal team at the Paris Olympics consisting of three men and three women, despite the Taliban's refusal to recognise the three female participants. While it is not yet clear what will be done for 2028, the Paris games showed that it is possible for governing bodies to show leadership against the Taliban's immoral and unjust discrimination.

Previous Governments have advocated for sports boycotts against apartheid South Africa, and for the neutral rather than national status of Russian and Belarussians athletes at the Paris Olympics as a result of their nations' illegal invasion of Ukraine. It was therefore disappointing to hear your rejection of a proposed boycott against the Afghanistan men's team, without any proposals for alternative actions that could improve the dire situation for female Afghan athletes. I urge the Government to strengthen its resolve and show solidarity with the women and girls of Afghanistan by taking a stronger position against the participation of Taliban-backed athletes in sporting events.

I would be grateful if you would answer the following questions by 3rd February:

- In what circumstances would the Government support a boycott by our teams due to be playing Taliban-backed athletes?
- Will the Government make representations to the ICC, FIFA and IOC to find a consistent solution that upholds the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan?
- What plans does the Government have to use the convening power of sport to bring a coalition of nations together for a coordinated approach on this matter?

The Prime Minister has said we should remember that cricket for a long time has been a beacon of hope for the people in Afghanistan. But we must consider what hope there is for women and girls living under the Taliban – when they are being denied access to schools, universities, sport, healthcare and all forms of public life, and when their faces are banned from view and their voices from being heard - and what message the British Government is sending them by not taking action where it can.

Yours sincerely,

Dame Caroline Dinenage MP
Chair, Culture, Media and Sport Committee