



Department
for Culture,
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Dame Caroline Dinenage MP
Chair, Culture, Media and Sport Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

7 February 2025

Dear Caroline,

Afghanistan and sport participation

Thank you for your letter of 20 January 2025 in relation to the participation of Afghan teams and athletes in international sporting competition.

I share your view about the appalling erosion of women and girls' rights in Afghanistan and I am clear that the Afghan women's team have the right to participate in international cricket. The situation they face is completely unacceptable.

However, on 8 January, the Prime Minister was quick to call on the International Cricket Council (ICC) to take the lead on this, and has spoken more widely about how cricket has been a beacon of hope for people in Afghanistan. In addition, both my officials and I have discussed this issue directly with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and welcome their strong representations to the ICC on the issue of the Afghanistan Cricket Board's adherence to ICC membership rules, and on how to support the Afghanistan women's cricket team.

Regarding the specific issue about the use of boycotts in sport, we have received representations which reflect the strong public opinions on both sides of the argument. While we appreciate that boycotts can be a powerful symbolic tool and recognise the importance of focusing on human rights issues in sport, we believe sport boycotts to be counter-productive as they penalise our hard-working athletes. They are not the people we should be penalising for the Taliban's appalling actions against women and girls.

As a Government there are other steps we can take, such as ensuring no ministerial or official attendance at specific sporting events. We are considering the full range of levers at our disposal.

We are delighted that the ECB and Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), alongside Cricket Australia and Cricket South Africa, are making the running in helping Afghanistan's female players back into competition. My officials have also been in contact with their Australian counterparts to support this. I also note the announcement by the ECB that the England team will fulfil their ICC Champions Trophy fixture vs Afghanistan on Wednesday 26 February.



We were delighted to see the announcement on Friday 31 January of the Global Refugee Cricket Fund and 'Pitch Our Future'. This very welcome initiative led by the MCC, MCC Foundation and ECB should be transformative for the Afghanistan women players. It was heartening to see the Afghanistan women in action last week for the first time since 2021, against Cricket Without Borders in Melbourne.

It is clear to me, however, that the ICC should do more to support the Afghanistan women's cricket team and to provide an explanation as to why they are not adhering to their own membership rules.

We strongly urge the ICC to support this initiative and ensure a safe return to competition for the Afghanistan women's team in some capacity as soon as possible. We would also welcome similar efforts by FIFA to support Afghanistan women's football. It is for the ECB and FA to engage with their international counterparts the ICC and FIFA, as is the protocol given the independence of sports bodies. However, we meet the ECB and FA regularly and are supportive of their approach.

We will continue to watch closely to see the ICC's response and justification for their approach. We hope they will do their utmost to restore the women's team to full competition as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa Nandy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport