

## **Andrew Jennings - the journalist who exposed FIFA, slams Azerbaijan's European Games**

Andrew Jennings, the Scottish journalist who exposed corruption in world football, has criticised the European Olympic Committees' controversial European Games, which open this Friday (12 June) in Azerbaijan.

Speaking in support of the **Sport For Rights campaign**, Jennings said today:

*"Azerbaijan's gangster rulers and European Olympic officials are made for each other, showing that like with FIFA, some sports officials sit easily with suppression of human rights. They should tell us how many jars of caviar have been lavished on them. These so-called European Games are an excuse for the ruling clans to steal even more from the country's oil revenues in construction projects. Journalists should think twice before visiting this cruel dictatorship. Anyone who wants to meet their most inspiring journalists should visit the local Baku prisons and ask for them".*

The games have coincided with a crackdown on opposition to the Aliyev government in Azerbaijan. **Rasul Jafarov**, who launched the Sport For Rights campaign to highlight human rights abuses in Azerbaijan, was sentenced to six-and-a-half years in prison for "abuse of power". His appeal against his sentence was due to coincide with the European Games opening ceremony, but has been postponed, with the authorities wary of international press attention.

**Khadija Ismayilova**, one of the world's greatest and most tenacious investigative journalists, has been detained without trial for over six months. In total, there are currently eight journalists and five human rights defenders behind bars for political reasons in Azerbaijan. Sport for Rights calls for their immediate and unconditional release.

On the eve of the games, the authorities have signalled that Azerbaijan is now closed to international human rights organisations. On 9 June, **Emma Hughes**, a campaigner for Platform, which is part of the Sport for Rights coalition, was detained at the Baku airport when attempting to enter Azerbaijan as a journalist accredited to cover the European Games. She was told she was on a "red list" and was deported. On 10 June, **Amnesty International** revealed that it had cancelled its plans for a Baku report launch after the authorities said its delegation was not welcome to visit at this time.

**Sport for Rights Coordinator Rebecca Vincent**, also barred entry to Azerbaijan since 2012, commented:

*"The Azerbaijani authorities' refusal to allow human rights defenders from Platform and Amnesty into the country is outrageous. The ruling regime has spent a fortune promoting the European Games, and has invited the world to take part in the spectacle. This shows once again that despite the regime's attempts to promote a positive image abroad, there is a more sinister truth behind the glitz and glam. The ruling regime clearly has something to hide when it comes to human rights practices".*

Dutch politician Marietje Schaake MEP (D66/ALDE) has called on European leaders not to attend official ceremonies during the European Games in Azerbaijan, until political prisoners are released.

*Schaake: "The authorities in Azerbaijan are interested in hosting major international events, in order to increase the international stature of Azerbaijan. Yet the European Games should not mask the fact that fundamental rights are systematically being violated. Activists such as Leyla Yunus, who was nominated for the Sakharov Prize of the European Parliament last year, are in prison without medical care or access to a lawyer. Only after political prisoners are released it is appropriate for European politicians to attend the official gatherings in Baku."*

*In the days before the European Games are opened, Amnesty International and Platform have been denied entry to Azerbaijan. Schaake: "This is unacceptable. The label "European" should have meaning, and the Games should only be organised in countries where human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected. Especially now, when the spotlight is on Azerbaijan, European leaders should stand for human rights in the country."*

On 28 May, Marietje Schaake and MEPs from other political groups in the European Parliament submitted a joint statement to High Representative Mogherini, Commissioner Hahn and the 28 European Ministers of Foreign Affairs. This statement can be found here: <http://www.marietjeschaake.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Joint-Statement-Azerbaijan.pdf>

With human rights advocacy and campaigning now impossible in the current climate in Azerbaijan, Sport for Rights is coordinating with human rights organisations across Europe to organise **a series of protest actions on 12 June to mark the opening ceremony of the games**. Protesters will be calling for an end to the ongoing human rights crackdown in Azerbaijan, and the release of the country's jailed journalists and human rights defenders. **Actions will take place in Barcelona, Berlin, Geneva, London, Oslo, Prague, San Foca (Italy), Tbilisi, Warsaw, Zagreb, and other locations to be confirmed.**

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