

To keep football beautiful, give the Palestinian campaign of hate a ‘red card’

written by Arsen Ostrovsky | 21.08.2024

Jibril Rajoub, a senior Palestinian Authority official and convicted terrorist, once declared, “If we had a nuke, we’d have used it [against Israel] this very morning.” Rajoub said this on Al-Mayadeen TV, a Hezbollah-affiliated television channel, the same Hezbollah which last month fired a rocket at Majdal Shams in northern Israel, murdering 12 young children playing football.

Rajoub, who also heads up the ‘Palestine Football Association,’ is now leading the Palestinian campaign to boot Israel from FIFA, the football world governing association, having failed to do so on previous occasions in 2015 and 2017.

A man with seemingly no shortage of titles, Rajoub also serves as President of the Palestinian Olympic Committee and tried – unsuccessfully – to boot Israel from the Paris Olympics. But the International Olympics Committee (IOC) would have none of that, with IOC President Thomas Bach saying: “We are not in the political business, we are there to accomplish our mission to get the athletes together.”

Rajoub’s only mission however, spanning more than five decades in radical Palestinian politics, has been to glorify terror, incite violence against Israel and politicize international sports, by trying to have the Jewish state kicked out of every sporting association he can find, or in his own words “using athletes as an asset in our resistance and in our struggle.”

Rajoub’s first conviction for terror was in 1970, after he was sentenced to life imprisonment in Israel, for belonging to an armed group and throwing a grenade at an Israeli army vehicle. He served 15 years before being released in a prisoner exchange. Rajoub was subsequently arrested and convicted at least a further three times, on various charges relating to involvement in acts of terror and has spent at least two decades in prison.

With a bottomless CV of spewing relentless antisemitism, incitement and racial hatred, Rajoub has also called Jews “Satans” and Zionists as “the sons of dogs”.

Rajoub's most recent mission to have Israel kicked out of FIFA, is based on the mendacious claim that Israel is committing "genocide" in Gaza. Of course, Rajoub fails to mention any role played by Hamas in the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, or their ongoing captivity of at least 115 hostages in Gaza, including women, children and the elderly. Nor does Rajoub mention that Israeli players and football staff have been among the casualties of Hamas's ongoing terror.

FIFA seeks legal advice

In response, FIFA has sought independent legal advice to analyze and assess Rajoub's request, with the final decision expected to be made later this month by the FIFA Council.

The fact of the matter is, there is no legal basis upon which to kick Israel out of FIFA, and this is no more than just the latest political stunt from Rajoub, as part of a years-long campaign to sanction Israel and expel or suspend it from international football.

Israel is not in breach of any FIFA rules or regulations, they are not impeding Palestinian football players from participating in the sport and there are no security considerations presented by Israel's ongoing participation in FIFA.

If anything, FIFA should instead consider permanently banning Rajoub from having any official role in football administration, following engagement in repeated behavior promoting racism, derogatory comments and discrimination, which are strictly prohibited and punishable by suspension or expulsion, pursuant to Section 15 of the FIFA Disciplinary Code and Article 4 of the FIFA Statutes, as well as his wholesale violation of the FIFA Code of Ethics.

In fact, in 2018, Rajoub was handed a 12-month suspension by FIFA precisely for inciting attacks on football legend Lionel Messi 2018 ahead of Argentina's match against Israel, which was subsequently forced to be canceled.

Instead of learning the lessons of his past misdemeanours, Rajoub has only doubled down on his racial hatred and incitement, including expressing support for the October 7th massacre and called Hamas leader and October 7th mastermind Yahya Sinwar a "pragmatic, patriotic, and realistic man".

And this is the man preaching about ethics and fair play to Israel?

FIFA's current flagship campaign, "Football Unites the World," promotes the sport as a "global movement to inspire, unite ... and bring people together, all over the world, to celebrate the beautiful game."

In Israel, football truly plays a unifying role and serves as a beacon of co-existence in the best spirit of FIFA and international football, with roughly a third of all football clubs and players being from the Arab-Israeli sector. Any penalties therefore imposed on the Israel Football Association would directly impact one of the most exemplary venues for Arab-Israeli coexistence.

In order to indeed keep football as a force for good and politics out of sport, FIFA must once and for all give a 'red card' to Jibril Rajoub's relentless campaign of hate against Israel, and dismiss this baseless campaign to exclude the Jewish state from "the beautiful game".

Published in The Jerusalem Post, August 21, 2024.