

To: President Gianni Infantino  
Federation Internationale de Football Association,  
FIFA Strasse 20,  
P.O Box 8044,  
Zurich,  
Switzerland

Dear President Infantino,

### **Aramco sponsorship is a middle finger to women's football**

For most of our time as professional players, it has felt like things are improving for women in football. For many, our experience now is unrecognisable from that of the women who came before us. Whilst we're far from where we want to be, we're making progress.

There's a whole generation growing up today in a world where the ambition of becoming a professional footballer is not just the dream of young boys. Women's games across the world are posting record attendances and viewing figures, clubs and sponsors are beginning to properly finance the women's game, and last summer the Women's World Cup saw nearly two million tickets sold.<sup>1</sup> As part of that, we're continuing to push forward into a world where football is truly for everyone and LGBTQ+ players and fans are welcomed in the stands and on the pitch.

But FIFA's announcement of Saudi Aramco as its 'major' partner has set us so far back that it's hard to fully take in. Saudi Aramco is the main money-pump for Saudi Arabia, and is 98.5 % state-owned.

Saudi authorities have been spending billions in sports sponsorship to try to distract from the regime's brutal human rights reputation, but its treatment of women speaks for itself.<sup>2</sup>

This is a regime that in January 2023 sentenced a Leeds (UK) PhD student, dental hygienist and a mother of two Salma al-Shehab to 27 years in prison followed by a 27 year travel ban for retweeting in favour of free speech.<sup>3</sup> It's a regime that only allowed women to drive in 2018, and even then locked up the women who had campaigned for that progress to take place, subjecting them to sexual harassment and torture during interrogation. Those released are still under travel bans and face restrictions on their freedom of expression, including women's rights activist Loujain Al-Hathloul and her family.<sup>4</sup> The week after FIFA announced the partnership with Aramco, fitness instructor Manahel al-Otaibi was sentenced to 11 years in prison under 'anti-terror' laws, simply for promoting female empowerment on social media.<sup>5</sup> Other women who are currently incarcerated simply for peaceful expression of their views include 18-year-old secondary school student Manal al-Gafiri (imprisoned for 18 years), Fatima al-Shawarbi (30 years), Sukaynah al-Aithan (40 years), and Nourah al-Qahtani (45 years).

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<sup>1</sup> 'Staggering statistics demonstrate FIFA Women's World Cup Growth', [FIFA](#); 'Largest attendances in Women's Football History', [Sport Bible](#); 'Annual Review of Football Finance', [Deloitte](#)

<sup>2</sup> 'Saudi Arabia is Spending a Fortune on Sport', [The Economist](#)

<sup>3</sup> 'Saudi Arabia: Release woman sentenced to 27 years for tweets', [Amnesty International](#)

<sup>4</sup> 'You can't leave and we won't tell you why: travel bans in Saudi Arabia', [Amnesty International](#)

<sup>5</sup> 'Manahel al-Otaibi: Saudi women's rights activist jailed for 11 years', [BBC](#)

The Saudi authorities trample not only on the rights of women, but on the freedom of all other citizens too. Imagine LGBTQ+ players, many of whom are heroes of our sport, being expected to promote Saudi Aramco during the 2027 World Cup, the national oil company of a regime that criminalises the relationships that they are in and the values they stand for?

Finally, as the largest state-owned oil and gas company in the world, Saudi Aramco is one of the corporations which is most responsible for burning football's future.<sup>6</sup> Grassroots football across the world is being smashed by extreme heat, drought, fires and floods, but as we all pay the consequences Saudi Arabia rakes in its profits, with FIFA as its cheerleader.

With the record of Russia 2018 and Qatar 2022, we don't have to look far for examples of the last time FIFA sold its principles and those of football's fans and players. FIFA's recent decisions are made by a Council of 37, of which only 8 are women (22%). These are decisions made by men privileged enough not to be threatened by Saudi authorities' treatment of women, those who are LGBTQ+, migrants, minorities or those whose present and future are most at threat from climate change.

Exactly a year ago, many of us came together to play at the pinnacle of our sport in the Women's 2023 World Cup. The inclusivity and sustainability of that World Cup set a new standard for football, and one which FIFA should be looking to build on. Instead of a step forward, having Saudi Aramco as the sponsor for the next World Cup in 2027 would be a stomach punch to the women's game, undermining decades of work from fans and players around the globe. A corporation that bears glaring responsibility for the climate crisis, owned by a state that criminalises LGBTQ+ individuals and systematically oppresses women, has no place sponsoring our beautiful game.

We wish that all people in Saudi Arabia, including women and girls, receive access to and enjoyment from sport, whether as participants or fans. It is because we stand alongside the citizens of Saudi Arabia whose human rights are violated that we are speaking out. We don't want to be part of covering up these violations.

We urge FIFA to reconsider this partnership and replace Saudi Aramco with alternative sponsors whose values align with gender equality, human rights and the safe future of our planet. We also propose the establishment of a review committee with player representation, to evaluate the ethical implications of future sponsorship deals and ensure they align with our sport's values and goals.

We ask FIFA three questions: 1. How can FIFA justify this sponsorship given the human rights violations committed by the Saudi authorities? 2. How can FIFA defend this sponsorship given Saudi Aramco's significant responsibility for the climate crisis? 3. What is FIFA's response to our proposal of the establishment of a review committee with player representation?

This sponsorship is much worse than an own goal for football: FIFA might as well pour oil on the pitch and set it alight. Our job as professional players has been a dream for us and is a dream for the girls who will be the players of the future. We deserve so much better from our governing body than its allyship with this nightmare sponsor.

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<sup>6</sup> [Carbon Majors](#) database of historical production data from world's largest oil and gas companies.

Signed in a personal capacity by 106 professional players:

**Sofie Junge Pedersen** - Inter Milan with 88 caps for Danish national team

**Tessel Middag** - Rangers FC with 44 caps for the Dutch national team

**Katie Rood** - former player for Juventus, Southampton and Lewes FC with 15 caps for New Zealand national team

**Becky Sauerbrunn** - Captain of Portland Thorns, former captain of US national team with 217 caps

**Jessie Fleming** - Portland Thorns, Captain of Canadian national team with 132 caps

**Elena Linari** - AS Roma, Captain of Italian national team with 105 caps

**Doris Bacic** - SSC Napoli, Captain of Croatian national team with 84 caps

**Khalida Popal** - Co-founder and former Captain of the Afghanistan national team

**Jane Ross** - Rangers FC, with 151 caps for Scottish national team

**Linda Sällström** - Vittsjö GIK with 139 caps for Finnish national team

**Loes Geurts** - BK Häcken with 125 caps for the Dutch national team

**Tinja-Riikka Korpela** - Servette FC with 123 caps for Finnish national team

**Vivianne Miedema** - Manchester City with 120 caps for Dutch national team

**Erin McLeod** - Stjarnan FC with 119 caps for Canadian national team

**Lisa Evans** - Bristol City with 109 caps for Scottish national team

**Diane Caldwell** - FC Zürich with 102 caps for Irish national team

**Sanni Franssi** - Real Sociedad with 81 caps for Finnish national team

**Erin Nayler** - Bayern Munich with 68 caps for New Zealand national team

**Ayisat Yusuf** - former player for Delta Queens FC and River Angels SC with 68 caps for Nigerian national team

**Meikayla Moore** - former player for MSV Duisburg, Liverpool FC and Glasgow City with 67 caps for New Zealand national team

**Aivi Luik** - BK Häcken FF with 42 caps for Australian national team

**Gabi Rennie** - Åland United with 36 caps for New Zealand national team

**Alex Chidiac** - Melbourne Victory with 32 caps for Australian national team

**Viktoria Pinther** - Dijon FCO with 31 caps for Austrian national team

**Malia Steinmetz** - FC Nordsjælland with 28 caps for New Zealand national team

**Julia Tunturi** - Vittsjö GIK with 27 caps for the Finnish national team

**Luna Gevitz** - former player for Montpellier Hérault Sport Club, BK Häcken, Guingamp, with 25 caps for Danish national team

**Ella Van Kerckhoven** - Feyenoord with 24 caps for Belgium national team

**Katja Schroffenegger** - Como Women with 20 caps for Italian national team

**Lily Agg** - Birmingham City with 18 caps for Irish national team

**Ciara Grant** - Hibernian FC with 18 caps for Irish national team

**Niamh Charles** - Chelsea with 16 caps for English national team

**Andrine Tomter** - Rosenborg BK with 16 caps for Norwegian national team

**Francesca Durante** - Inter Milan with 12 caps for Italian national team

**Paulina Krumbiegel** - Juventus FC with 11 caps for the German national team

**Sarah Dyrehauge** - Aarhus Gymnastikforening with 9 caps for Danish national team

**Sinead Farrelly** - former player for Gotham FC with 8 caps for Irish national team

**Macey Leigh Fraser** - Utah Royals with 5 caps for New Zealand national team

**Sara Lindbak Hørte** - Rosenborg BK with 5 caps for Norwegian national team

**Emmi Siren** - FC Nordsjælland with 4 caps for Finnish national team  
**Amalie Thestrup** - Bristol City FC with 4 caps for Danish national team  
**Matilde Lundorf Skovsen** - SSC Napoli with 3 caps for Danish national team  
**Emma Regan** - HB Køge with 3 caps for Canadian national team  
**Emilía Kíær Ásgeirsdóttir** - FC Nordsjælland with 2 caps for Icelandic national team  
**Maitane Lopez Millan** - Gotham FC with 2 caps for Spanish national team  
**Rachele Baldi** - Inter Milan with 1 cap for Italian national team  
**Emma Beckett** - former player for Watford and Tottenham Hotspur with 1 cap for Irish national team  
**Samantha Chang** - Hb Køge with 1 cap for the Canadian national team  
**Norma Cinotti** - Sampdoria with 1 cap for Italian national team  
**Rhian Cleverly** - Rugby Borough WFC, Lewes FC with 1 cap for Welsh national team  
**Sierra Cota-Yarde** - Southern Methodist University with 1 cap for Portuguese national team  
**Abbie Cusack** - Dundee United with 1 cap for Scottish national team  
**Cecilie Fløe Nielsen** - Tampa Bay Sun FC with 1 cap for Danish national team  
**Jeanne Hillion** - Servette FC with 1 cap for French national team  
**Anna Koivunen** - IF Brommapojkarna with 1 cap for Finnish national team  
**Dana Leskinen** - IFK Norrköping with 1 cap for Finnish national team  
**Tecla Pettenuzzo** - SCC Napoli with 1 cap for Italian national team  
**Stephanie Ribeiro** - Universidad Nacional (Pumas) with 1 cap for Portuguese national team  
**Katrine Svane Jacobsen** - Aarhus Gymnastikforening and 1 cap for Danish national team  
**Alma Aagaard** - FC Nordsjælland  
**Simone Andersen** - FC Nordsjælland  
**Ella Beaton-Hill** - Spartans FC  
**Emilie Billing** - FC Thy-Thisted Q  
**Emilie Bølviken** - Stabæk Fotball Kvinner  
**Daina Bourma** - Servette FC  
**Kyra Carusa** - San Diego Wave  
**Amanda Brunholt** - FC Nordsjælland  
**Mathilde Carstens** - Celtic FC  
**Zalie Chaine** - Montpellier Hérault Sport Club  
**Isobel Dalton** - Perth Glory  
**Kess Elmore** - Brooklyn FC  
**Sophie French** - Odense Boldklub Q  
**Marie Gade** - Aarhus Gymnastikforening  
**Marina Georgieva** - AC Fiorentina  
**Winonah Heatley** - FC Nordsjælland  
**Ziva Henry** - Feyenoord  
**Selma Hernes** - Lyn Fotball Damer  
**Kristin Holmen** - Lyn Fotball Damer  
**Marie Holmgaard** - Odense Boldklub Q  
**Emma Ilijoski** - Hearts of Midlothian FC  
**Gillian Inglis** - Motherwell FC  
**Julie Jensen** - Odense Boldklub Q  
**Emmy Jézéquel** - RC Strasbourg  
**Hannah Jordan** - Spartans FC

**Elin Landström** - former player for IFK Norrköping, AS Roma and Inter Milan

**Alexandra Larsson** - BK Häcken FF

**Jenna Legg** - Oxford United

**Martine Leonards** - Stabæk Fotball Kvinner

**Rosie Livingstone** - Hibernian FC

**Signe Markvardsen** - Hb Køge

**Mallie McKenzie** - Portland Thorns

**Meaghan Nally** - Portland Thorns

**Jaida Nyby** - Vittsjö GIK

**Marie Lynge Olesen** - Aarhus Gymnastikforening

**Nyla Peterkin** - Rugby Borough WFC

**Gabby Provenzano** - Portland Thorns

**Anja Rasmussen** - Stabæk Fotball Kvinner

**Elisa Rambaud** - Montpellier Hérault Sport Club

**Mathilde Rasmussen** - Aarhus Gymnastikforening

**Viivi Spets** - Ilves

**Arna Þráinsdóttir** - Odense Boldklub Q

**Saana Tuomala** - Ilves

**Jill van den Ende** - ADO Den Haag

**Manon van Raay** - ADO Den Haag

**Amber Verspaget** - Feyenoord

**Olivia Wänglund** - Vittsjö