

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.¹ 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.²

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.³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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).

¹ '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](#)

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

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

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

⁵ '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.⁶ 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.

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