

Joint statement on FIFA misgovernance, 27 May 2025

Ten years ago today, Swiss police officers, acting under instructions from the US Department of Justice (DoJ), entered the Baur Au Lac hotel in Zurich and arrested seven senior FIFA officials. The subsequent US Department of Justice prosecutions resulted in bribery and corruption charges against more than 50 individual and corporate defendants from more than 20 countries. They should also have prompted the most significant internal governance reforms at football's global governing body since its inception in 1904.

In February 2016, delegates at FIFA's extraordinary congress in Zurich voted 176 to 22 in favour of adopting a series of structural reforms and Gianni Infantino was elected FIFA President. "We will restore the image of FIFA and the respect of FIFA. And everyone in the world will applaud us," Mr Infantino told the FIFA Congress.

It is time to recognise that these reforms have failed to usher in a new era of responsible governance at FIFA and that the organisation is structurally unfit to govern world football. FIFA is arguably more poorly governed today than it was 10 years ago.

The reason for this failure is that the reforms that began in 2016 did not address the key structural flaws at the root of many of FIFA's governance problems, most notably the deeply problematic power dynamic between the organisation's executive branch and its member associations. FIFA redistributes a large proportion of the revenue it generates to its member associations and confederations. There is little verifiable evidence to show that the primary impact of this redistribution has been the development of the game, and considerable evidence to suggest its main purpose has been to ensure the loyalty and allegiance of member associations. The power of its most senior and powerful officials is rooted in this model of patronage, which disincentivises ethical conduct and precludes effective internal reform. As a consequence of these structural problems, FIFA under Gianni Infantino continued to [undermine](#) or [dissolve](#) mechanisms designed to ensure independent oversight of FIFA's executive branch, and in 2024 FIFA [reversed key reforms](#) introduced in 2016.

The negative consequences of FIFA's misgovernance are evident both on and off the pitch, and while it is not the only governing body beset by organisational dysfunction, as the global governing body of the world's most popular sport, its failures have more serious and widespread impact.

- This year's inaugural 32-team Club World Cup, organised by FIFA with the support and encouragement of the [European Club Association](#), will exacerbate [fixture congestion](#), and the USD 1 billion prize fund will further skew [competitive balance](#) in multiple domestic competitions around the world.
- FIFA has failed to redress the [lack of diversity](#) in governance and administration, it has not taken meaningful steps to address [unequal pay and conditions](#) in the women's game, and it has [yet to implement trauma-informed mechanisms](#) to support and remedy women and girls who have been victims of abuse, despite multiple abuse scandals around the world.
- Systematic and basic failures in due diligence have resulted in a [wide range of human rights violations](#) directly linked to the hosting of World Cups. FIFA's last four men's World Cups have resulted in tens of thousands of evictions, increases in police violence and enhanced state repression, and has placed potentially hundreds of thousands into situations of forced labour, resulting in a significant number of unnecessary and preventable deaths. The most serious failures in this regard – in Qatar in 2022 – arrived after the 2016 reforms.
- FIFA's business model for World Cup tournaments remains extractive, placing a huge financial burden on host governments and taxpayers. This is compounded by the [tax exemptions](#) it demands for itself and its partners. While taking advantage of exceptionally low taxation rates in Switzerland

due to its association status under Swiss law, FIFA has accrued [financial reserves](#) of USD 3.97 billion.

- Since 2016, FIFA has selectively enforced its statutory rules, often in ways that favour powerful allies or favoured member associations. Political decision-making has increasingly been [delegated](#) to a mechanism called the Bureau of the FIFA Council, which only comprises Gianni Infantino and the presidents of the six continental confederations, and which the FIFA President chairs.
- FIFA bent, changed and [broke its rules](#) firstly to ensure that Saudi Arabia would be the sole bidder for the 2034 World Cup, and then to ensure that Saudi Arabia would be approved as hosts without a vote by the FIFA Congress. This tournament will in all likelihood lead to [thousands of unexplained deaths](#) among the migrant workers who will be required to construct the stadiums and infrastructure. FIFA has avoided sanctioning the Israel Football Association despite its long-standing and flagrant violation of FIFA rules that prohibit Israeli clubs playing matches [in illegal settlements](#).
- During the bidding process for the 2034 World Cup, a Saudi Arabian state entity, [Aramco](#), became FIFA's most lucrative sponsor, and FIFA sealed a broadcasting deal said to be worth USD 1 billion with an entity that is now part-owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund. In the midst of a climate crisis, FIFA World Cups will now bear and promote the brand of the world's biggest single corporate emitter of greenhouse gases.
- Since 2016, FIFA has increasingly come under the influence of authoritarians such as [Vladimir Putin](#) of Russia, Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia and [Donald Trump](#) of the United States. President Infantino repeatedly states that "football unites the world" but aligns himself and FIFA with politicians who sow division and fuel conflict.

Football has immense transformative potential, and this could and should be harnessed for social good. The game should serve the interests of clubs, communities, players, and supporters. However, in its current form, FIFA will continue to squander its potential, and will increasingly serve the political and commercial interests of organisations and individuals who pose a very serious threat to the game's long-term vitality and sustainability. We reject the notion that FIFA cannot be held accountable and cannot be forced to enact meaningful reforms, and call on those with any level of influence to encourage, make or shape policy in this realm, including politicians in Switzerland and Brussels, to work towards the reform of FIFA.

The following individuals and organisations have signed on to this statement:

Patrick Bond, Distinguished Professor, University of Johannesburg Centre for Social Change

Professor Jules Boykoff, Pacific University, USA

Professor EA Brett, Emeritus Professor, London School of Economics

Bénédict De Moerloose, international lawyer, Peter & Moreau

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Professor Christopher Gaffney, New York University

Dr Arnout Geeraert, Utrecht School of Governance

David Goldblatt, writer and author of "The Ball is Round: a global history of football"

Abdullah Ibhais, FIFA Qatar 2022 World Cup whistleblower

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Miloon Kothari, Independent Expert on Human Rights and Social Policy, Former UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing

Bonita Mersiades, FIFA Whistleblower and author of 'Whatever It Takes-The Inside Story of the FIFA Way'

Dr Dale T McKinley - Researcher-writer, lecturer and activist (Johannesburg, South Africa)

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ALQST for Human Rights

Celtic Club Udine

Fair Game

FairSquare

Fossil Free Football

Norsk Supporterallianse

NUFC Against Sportswashing

Tax Justice Network