

RESOLVED: “The United States should boycott the 2008 Beijing Olympics.”

BACKGROUND: Beijing, the capital city of The People’s Republic of China, was awarded the 2008 Summer Olympic Games by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in July 2001. The decision delighted the Chinese government and people, who saw it as international recognition of their country’s growing economic, sporting and political strength. Others criticised the choice of Beijing as rewarding a dictatorial government with a terrible human rights record and a history of international trouble-making. Indeed, China had originally bid in 1993 for the 2000 Olympics, and its failure to win enough IOC votes then was widely linked the international concern over its use of military force to put down student protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

The Beijing Olympics will take place from August 8th – 24th 2008, with some events such as sailing and equestrian sports taking place at other venues in China and Hong Kong. The event is a major priority for the Chinese Government and large areas of Beijing have been rebuilt in readiness for the Games, leading to some complaints about forced evictions and the destruction of historic buildings. Groups opposed to China’s government are also seeing the 2008 Olympics as an opportunity to focus the world’s attention on China in order to push for political change. One of China’s greatest fears is that these groups may be able to persuade some countries to boycott (stay away from) the Beijing Olympics, spoiling the Games and diminishing China’s international status. Both the 1980 Moscow Olympics and the 1984 Games in Los Angeles suffered boycotts from a range of countries protesting against the policies of the host nation, but the last five Summer Olympics have all passed without significant protest.

AFFIRMATIVE CASE**Reporters Without Borders*****Repression continues in China, one year before Olympic Games***

When the International Olympic Committee assigned the 2008 summer Olympic Games to Beijing on 13 July 2001, the Chinese police were intensifying a crackdown on subversive elements, including Internet users and journalists. Six years later, nothing has changed. But despite the absence of any significant progress in free speech and human rights in China, the IOC's members continue to turn a deaf ear to repeated appeals from international organisations that condemn the scale of the repression.

From the outset, Reporters Without Borders has been opposed to holding the Olympic Games to Beijing. Now, a year before the opening ceremony, it is clear the Chinese government still sees the media and Internet as strategic sectors that cannot be left to the "hostile forces" denounced by President Hu Jintao. The departments of propaganda and public security and the cyber-police, all conservative bastions, implement censorship with scrupulous care.

At least 30 journalists and 50 Internet users are currently detained in China. Some of them since the 1980s. The government blocks access to thousands for-news websites. It jams the Chinese, Tibetan and Uyghur-language programmes of 10 international radio stations. After focusing on websites and chat forums, the authorities are now concentrating on blogs and video-sharing sites. China's blog services incorporate all the filters that block keywords considered "subversive" by the censors. The law severely punishes "divulging state secrets," "subversion" and "defamation" - charges that are regularly used to silence the most outspoken critics. Although the rules for foreign journalists have been relaxed, it is still impossible for the international media to employ Chinese journalists or to move about freely in Tibet and Xinjiang.

Promises never kept

The Chinese authorities promised the IOC and international community concrete improvements in human rights in order to win the 2008 Olympics for Beijing. But they changed their tone after getting what they wanted. For example, then deputy Prime Minister Li Lanqing said, four days after the IOC vote in 2001, that "China's Olympic victory" should encourage the country to maintain its "healthy life" by combatting such problems as the Falungong spiritual movement, which had "stirred up violent crime." Several thousands of Falungong followers have been jailed since the movement was banned and at least 100 have died in detention.

A short while later, it was the turn of then Vice-President Hu Jintao (now president) to argue that after the Beijing "triumph," it was "crucial to fight without equivocation against the separatist forces orchestrated by the Dalai Lama and the world's anti-China forces." In the west of the country, where there is a sizeable Muslim minority, the authorities in Xinjiang province executed Uyghurs for "separatism."

Finally, the police and judicial authorities were given orders to pursue the "Hit Hard" campaign against crime. Every year, several thousand Chinese are executed in public, often in stadiums, by means of a bullet in the back of the neck or lethal injection.

The IOC cannot remain silent any longer

The governments of democratic countries that are still hoping “the Olympic Games will help to improve the human right situation in China” are mistaken. The “constructive dialogue” advocated by some is leading nowhere.

The repression of journalists and cyber-dissidents has not let up in the past seven years. Everything suggests that it is going to continue. The IOC has given the Chinese government a job that it is going to carry out with zeal - the job of “organising secure Olympic Games.” For the government, this means more arrests of dissidents, more censorship and no social protest movements.

This is not about spoiling the party or taking the Olympic Games hostage. And anyway, it is China that has taken the games and the Olympic spirit hostage, with the IOC’s complicity. The world sports movement must now speak out and call for the Chinese people to be allowed to enjoy the freedoms it has been demanding for years. The Olympic Charter says sport must be “at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.” Athletes and sports lovers have the right and the duty to defend this charter. The IOC should show some courage and should do everything possible to ensure that Olympism’s values are not freely flouted by the Chinese organisers.

The IOC is currently in the best position to demand concrete goodwill gestures from the Chinese government. It should demand a significant improvement in the human rights situation before the opening ceremony on 8 August 2008.

And the IOC should not bow to the commercial interests of all those who regard China as a vital market in which nothing should be allowed to prevent them from doing business.

No Olympic Games without democracy!

Reporters Without Borders calls on the National Olympic Committees, the IOC, athletes, sports lovers and human rights activists to publicly express their concern about the countless violations of every fundamental freedom in China.

After Beijing was awarded the games in 2001, Harry Wu, a Chinese dissident who spent 19 years in prisons in China, said he deeply regretted that China did not have “the honour and satisfaction of hosting the Olympic Games in a democratic country.”

Russian dissident Vladimir Bukovsky’s outraged comment about the holding of the 1980 Olympics in Moscow - “Politically, a grave error; humanly, a despicable act; legally, a crime” - remains valid for 2008.

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NEGATIVE CASE

NBC *Sports*

Don't boycott Beijing

Thursday August 09

By Alan Abrahamson

Two members of Congress from California have in the past week introduced resolutions calling for a boycott of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing....

... The House resolutions, timed to this week's one-year-to-go observations so as to achieve maximum publicity, follow a call in June by a Democratic presidential candidate, Gov. Bill Richardson of New Mexico, for consideration of a 2008 Olympic boycott.

History has proven that boycotts do not further, much less achieve, political ends. All they do is dash the dreams of athletes.

The 1980 U.S. boycott of the Moscow Games, sparked by the Soviet-led invasion of Afghanistan the year before, hardly hastened the end of that war; the last Soviet troops were not withdrawn from Afghanistan until 1989. The rich irony, of course, is that it's now U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

The Soviet-led boycott of the 1984 Los Angeles Games achieved – nothing. Payback, maybe.

Peter Ueberroth, now the chairman of the U.S. Olympic Committee who in 1984 headed those Los Angeles Games, last week called Olympic boycotts "stupid."

No one disputes that the humanitarian crisis in Darfur is grave, that Arab militiamen backed by the Sudanese government are responsible for the crisis and that China's ties to the Sudanese government are considerable.

The overarching problem with an Olympic boycott is that such a proposition fails the logic test. Withdrawing American athletes from the 2008 Olympics will not force the militiamen to stop killing.

Better to follow the lead of Joey Cheek, the gold medal-winning speedskater at the 2006 Torino Games who donated his \$25,000 medal bonus to humanitarian aid efforts in Darfur and who has since continued to press the Chinese government to help find political and diplomatic solutions to the crisis.

Cheek consistently and firmly resists boycott calls. Why? As he told New York Times' columnist Harvey Araton last week, the Olympics offer a grand stage "to fight for an ideal that you believe in."

BOTH**United Press International****By SHIHOKO GOTO**

UPI Senior Correspondent

TOKYO, May 25 (UPI) -- China's human rights record and its authoritarian regime are disturbing to many Americans, but calls for the United States to boycott the Beijing Olympics next summer in protest remain in the minority.

The UPI/Zogby poll of more than 5,000 Americans, weighted to make it representative of the country as a whole, found that even though more than 46 percent do not expect China to make any changes in its human rights policies as a result of hosting the Olympics, a resounding 78 percent of respondents said the United States should not boycott the summer games in protest.

Meanwhile, nearly 39 percent "strongly disagreed" with the idea that U.S. participation in the Beijing Olympics would validate Chinese government policies, while about 34 percent "somewhat disagreed" with the statement. Moreover, 33 percent said they were "somewhat favorable" towards the International Olympic Committee's decision to award the 2008 summer games to Beijing, with nearly 12 percent stating that they were "very favorable" about the outcome.

Such findings should be music to the ears of the Chinese authorities, who are stepping up efforts not only to build up their capital's infrastructure to host the games, but are also cleaning up the streets and air quality to meet international standards. Certainly, the Olympics are seen as an opportunity for Beijing to showcase itself as a global metropolis, and for the Chinese government to highlight its cultural accomplishments as much as its economic might.

Yet many international advocacy groups are rallying to increase pressure to get the Chinese authorities to respect human rights if they are to host the games. In fact, Amnesty International is concerned that the games are being used as an excuse for the government to purge dissidents from the capital.

"If the Chinese authorities and the International Olympic Committee are serious about the Olympics having a 'lasting legacy' for China, they should be concerned that the Games are being used as a pretext to entrench and extend forms of detention that have been on China's reform agenda for many years," said Catherine Baber, Amnesty's Asia-Pacific director.

Most advocacy groups broadly agree that while China is making steady progress in preparing to host the Olympics, there has been almost no change in the country's political climate, and some argue that the crackdown on government opposition has actually only intensified. A group of human rights organizations including the Federation for a Democratic China, which was founded by Chinese exiles after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre to rally for political freedom in the country, wrote to IOC President Jacques Rogge last week calling for the committee to hold the Beijing Organizing Committee accountable for the lack of progress on human rights since 2001, when the city won the right to host the games.

Those calling for the independence of Tibet too are clamoring for foreign governments to challenge the Chinese authorities about their hold on the region, particularly as Beijing is limiting media access to Tibet both before and during the games.

"The opportunity that the Olympics bring to foreign journalists to interview individuals freely all over China has been denied in Tibet. Again the Tibetans have been betrayed with another promise broken in the full sight of the international community," argued Yael Weisz Rind, director of the London-based Free Tibet Campaign.

Public support for such campaigns appears to be on the rise. Of the 5,141 adults surveyed between May 16 and 18, Zogby found that 57 percent would "strongly oppose" the Chinese government suppressing demonstrations by human rights organizations during the Olympics, only 28 percent of respondents said they would "strongly support" advocacy groups using the games as an opportunity to make political statements against the country's human rights policies.

Still, most Americans are hesitant to vote with their wallets against China's human rights record. Questioned whether U.S. consumers should boycott products of U.S. corporations who sponsor the Beijing games, nearly three-quarters of those polled said that they were against boycotting products, with only 14 percent being for such a move.

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