

JUNE 2012

Letter from President Jibril Rajoub, Palestine Football Association to Michel Platini, UEFA

Dear President, Dear Brother

It saddens me again to write to you to report yet another Israeli transgression against Palestinian players which adds another injury to a series that never seems to end. The latest happened to national team player Mahmoud Kamel Mohammad Sarsak who has been imprisoned by the Israeli government for three years without any trial or charge.

The player Mahmoud, who lives in Rafah in the Gaza Strip, was arrested on 22 July 2009 at a checkpoint when he was on his way to the West Bank to join his new Mirkaz Bakata club. He was interrogated for 30 days and then imprisoned without any trial or a precise legal charge. Family and friends are denied the right to visit him. And they don't know why he is being detained for already nearly three years.

Israeli occupation authorities term him as "an illegal combatant"?! A term unheard-of justify an equally illegal indefinite imprisonment.

To protest against his condition and lack of civil liberties Sarsak started a hunger strike. The 25-year-old footballer has not eaten for 89 days and has lost approximately 30kg of his weight. According to human rights organisation Addameer the situation of Mahmoud is critical.

But Sarsak is not the only player detained in this manner: the goalkeeper of the Olympic team, Omar Khaled Abu Itweis, 23 years old, was abducted by an undercover Israeli military force from his work in the Palestinian Red Crescent without charges and is still in detention since the beginning of February 2012.

Also, player Mohammad Saadi Ibrahim Nimner, 22 years old, who plays for Al-Amaari professional club, was arrested by Israeli occupation forces in the end of February 2012 and is still detained without charges or trial.

So we are deeply concerned about the situation of our footballers. Sarsak, as you can see, is not the only player who is suffering from the illegal transgressions of the Israeli occupation. For athletes in Palestine there is no real freedom of movement and the risks of being detained or even killed are always looming before their eyes.

What is happening in reality is the Israeli government continuation of a direct violation of FIFA regulations and the International Olympic charter.

As well we ask Your Excellency to not give Israel the honour to host the next UEFA Under-21 Championship 2013. And also to ensure the commitment of Israeli government to FIFA regulations and international Olympic charter which relates to the Palestinian players and athletes.

I avail myself of the opportunity to renew to you the assurance of my highest consideration.

– General Jibril Rajoub President, Palestine Football Association