



Dr René Fasel  
International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF)  
Brandschenkestrasse 50,  
Postfach 1817,  
8027 Zurich, Switzerland

### Open Letter

**Zürich, 13.11.2020**

Dear Dr Fasel,

The Swiss-Belarusian Association RAZAM.CH, representing many Belarusians living in Switzerland, would like to hereby draw your attention to the situation around the 2021 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship that is due to be held in Latvia and Belarus on 21 May - 6 June 2021. Under normal circumstances, co-hosting such a high-rank sports event would be a great honour for any country. Regrettably, this is not the case for Belarus due to the reasons described below.

In the aftermath of presidential elections, held in Belarus on 9 August 2020, mass protests have been regularly taking place in Minsk and other places in Belarus, on some days counting several hundred thousand participants. Despite the absolutely peaceful nature of the protests, the state deploys police and military forces to suppress these activities. Bang grenades, tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannons have been regularly used in the streets in the past three months. Mass arrests, threatening, disproportionate use of force against peaceful protestors, as well as against random people, not to mention numerous recorded instances of torture and other inhumane and degrading treatment in the detention facilities, repressions against the media and individual journalists, regular blocking of the internet – all these have become a sad reality of today's Belarus. In response to these mass and rigorous human rights violations by the Belarusian authorities, deep concerns and strong condemnation have been widely expressed, both within the country and at the international level.

The Belarusian sports community did not stay aside. In their Open Letter to the authorities more than 1'000 Belarusian athletes and officials have called for the immediate stop of violence and release of all those illegally detained, among others. The Belarusian sports authorities have reacted by putting pressure on these athletes, many were dismissed from their jobs or denied training opportunities. As of the date of this Letter, at least five Belarusian athletes have served prison terms for taking part in peaceful protests, and over 20 other athletes have been dismissed from their jobs due to political views (please kindly refer to the attached material by the Belarusian Sport Solidarity Foundation (BSSF), for more details on the topic).

Among signatories of the Open Letter against violence, around 30 persons represent the

Belarusian ice hockey sports, including officials of the Belarusian Ice Hockey Federation. Mr. Gennadiy Savilov, had to leave his positions as the President of the Belarusian Ice Hockey Federation and Head of the 2021 IIHF WCHs Organizing Committee. At least three coaches and five administrative employees were forced to leave their jobs in this sports. Repressions against representatives of the Belarusian sports community have not stopped, affecting athletes, members of sports teams and sports officials.

The Belarusian Sport Solidarity Foundation has been active in drawing global attention to the facts of mass human rights violations occurring in Belarus and the persisting pressure on the sports community in this country. The BSSF is questioning, among other things, whether it would be appropriate to allow Belarus to co-host the 2021 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship. In the period from 2 November to 9 November, 2020, an electronic opinion poll was conducted by the *Golos* ("the Voice") platform, in which 420'075 registered and verified Belarusian citizens with the right to vote participated. The poll showed that:

- 90,85% were in favour of cancelling the Championship in Belarus;
- 3,41% urged not to cancel the Championship in Belarus;
- 5,74% were unable to choose an answer.

The Swiss-Belarusian Association RAZAM.CH is also deeply concerned with the current human rights situation in Belarus. Arrests and violence have not decreased, seriously affecting thousands of people, both active protestors and occasional passers, whether nationals or foreigners, regardless of their status or profession. We have strong grounds to fear that, if held in Belarus, the 2021 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship will put its participants, organizers, officials and numerous national teams' supporters at risk of violence and other serious human rights violations. This is not a matter of politics or political preferences, but a question of safety and security.

Against this background, we ask you and the IIHF to express solidarity with the Belarusian civil society and sports community, take into account all safety and reputational risks and consider transferring the Belarusian part of the 2021 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship to another country.

We count on your support and thank you in advance.

Yours faithfully,

Association RAZAM.CH  
Im Dornacher 15,  
8127 Forch, Switzerland

<https://razam.ch/>  
[info@razam.ch](mailto:info@razam.ch)  
[pr@razam.ch](mailto:pr@razam.ch)