



MEDIA RELEASE: 27 March 2023

Call on AOC to support Ukraine and not rubber-stamp IOC impending decision about ‘neutral’ Russian athletes

Australian-Ukrainian community outrage about an impending decision of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) **to allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete under a neutral flag in the Paris 2024 Olympics and Paralympics** has galvanised the community to write to the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) urging them to reject the move.

There is a looming tension between the AOC position and the Australian Government’s position. The AOC has supported IOC explorations, yet the Australian Government was one of 34 signatories to a February 2023 [joint statement](#) expressing concern about the IOC neutrality model because of the close relationship between athletes and the state in Russia and Belarus.

Stefan Romaniw OAM, Co-Chair of the Australian Federation of the Ukrainian Organisations (AFUO), said today “The negative impact of Russia’s invasion on Ukrainian sports and sportspeople has been profound.

“Russia’s war has killed at least 220 Ukrainian athletes and coaches. 11-year old gymnastics star, [Kateryna Diachenko](#), was killed when her house in Mariupol was bombed. Over 340 sports facilities have been damaged. It’s been reported around 3,000 athletes have joined the defence effort. For those seeking to compete, it is extremely difficult to [live, train and compete](#) whilst Russian bombs target their homes.”

“On the other hand, Russian athletes receive generous salaries and pensions from the state, benefit from state-based development and training programs, are part of the elite in Russia, and if successful, are used to promote Russian power.

“They also have strong links to the military. At the 2022 Beijing Olympic Games, 88% of the medals won by Russia were won by sportspeople associated with the Russian army and state security agencies. At the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, 45 of Russia’s 71 medals were won by athletes who were members of the Central Sports Club of the Russian Army.

“Do we really believe that the Olympic Games can be about peace and international cooperation when Russian athletes are members of the same military force which has been accused of over 65,000 war crimes in Ukraine?” he added.

The AFUO has written to the AOC ahead of the IOC 28-30 March 2023 meeting which is set to discuss Russian and Belarusian participation in international competitions. The AFUO has noted the [recent announcement](#) by the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC) stating concerns about ‘the absence of clarity and concrete details’ about the ‘neutrality’ model.

Australian Olympians and Paralympians who are standing with Ukraine on this issue and are ready to speak to the media include:



AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF UKRAINIAN ORGANISATIONS
СОЮЗ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ ОРГАНІЗАЦІЙ АВСТРАЛІЇ

Representing 22 Peak Ukrainian Organisations in Australia
Member of Ukrainian World Congress

- Victor Kovalenko OAM - Master coach of the Olympic sailing team and inductee to the Australian Sports Hall of Fame
- Malcolm Page - former Olympic sailor, dual Olympic champion and seven-time world champion
- Evan O'Hanlon - Paralympian, runner, Gold medallist 2008 & 2012
- Heath Francis - Paralympian, runner, Gold medallist 2000, 2004, 2008

Media queries: Stefan Romaniw 0419 531 255 Nadia Mencinsky (for queries regarding above media talent):
+61 416 253 963