

KNIGHTS MODEL UNITED NATIONS INVITATIONAL CONFERENCE

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UNITED NATIONS  
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL:  
SPORTSWASHING



DECEMBER 3, 2022

## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Hello, delegates! My name is Sydney Chan, and I'm really excited to be your chair for this year's Sportswashing Committee! I am a junior at The Bishop's School, and have participated in MUN since ninth grade. If you attended KnightsMUN last year, you may remember me as the Vice Chair for the Trojan Side of the Joint Crisis Committee titled, "The Trojan War." I love participating in conferences and discussing international affairs with other students, and can't wait to help guide collaboration and make this KnightsMUN a wonderful experience for all of you. For position paper guidelines, see the Position Paper tab on the KnightsMUN website.

I've always had a passion for international sports (I was actually named Sydney after the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games!), but adding in the complication of a nation's true motives for competing in an international sports competition makes it that much more interesting. With the past 2022 Beijing Winter Games, the recently concluded 2022 LIV Golf Invitational Series, and the ongoing construction of the stadium for the 2022 football World Cup in Qatar, many are beginning to wonder if this could be sportswashing's biggest year. Thus, it's more vital than ever for delegates to establish creative and efficient measures to mitigate the scale of sportswashing. I'm really looking forward to seeing various delegate solutions!

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to email me at [sydney.chan.24@bishops.com](mailto:sydney.chan.24@bishops.com).

# I. BACKGROUND

Sportswashing is a term commonly used to describe the individual, group, or government practice of utilizing sports to improve a reputation and/or public image spoiled by previous wrongdoings. According to *Prospect Magazine*, *sportswashing* was first used by Twitter users 10 years ago, and was based on *greenwashing*, a term that “gained popularity in the 1990s among environmental activists who targeted large corporations they considered guilty of projecting an environmentally conscious image while continuing to pollute.”<sup>1</sup> *Greenwashing* was based on *whitewashing*, a term first used in the 1950s and 60s with a figurative definition of “to cover up, conceal, [and/or] give a false appearance of cleanness to.”<sup>2</sup> Some other sources, such as the “Irish Times,” credit the coining of the term to the 2015 Sports or Rights campaign, used to expose Azerbaijan’s attempt to “distract from its human rights record with prestigious sponsorship and hosting of events,” such as the European Games held in Baku, the nation’s capital.<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, even though the term was not coined until recently, some of the oldest shows of sportswashing can be dated all the way back to the earlier decades of the 1900s, notably with the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. For two weeks in the heart of August, Adolf Hitler’s Nazi dictatorship concealed its deeply racist and militaristic character, and its targeting Jewish and Romani citizens, by promoting an image of a new, strong, and united German front.<sup>4</sup> The year began with the 2022 Beijing Winter Games and will conclude with the 2022 football World Cup in Qatar. Is 2022 set to be *the* year in which authoritarian regime after authoritarian regime looks to cover up their human rights atrocities?

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<sup>1</sup> “Word of the month: ‘Sportswashing’”

<sup>2</sup> “whitewash (v.)”

<sup>3</sup> “‘Sportswashing’ is the grim game of our times”

<sup>4</sup> “The Nazi Olympics Berlin 1936”

Beginning on February 4, 2022, China hosted the Winter Olympics. Among other concerns, the Chinese government was criticized for its inhumane interment of Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang region, attempts to gain control over Hong Kong, and the disappearance—and later reappearance after eighteen days—of world-renowned tennis player Peng Shuai, after she accused a Chinese official of sexual assault.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, some nations such as the US, the UK, Canada, India, Australia, and many more, decided to diplomatically boycott the Games (meaning that athletes can still compete but governmental officials will not attend).

The 2022 LIV Golf Invitational Series commenced shortly after the Games, on June 9, 2022. LIV is a Saudi-backed invitational tour, financed by a sovereign wealth fund chaired by the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman.<sup>6</sup> According to a US intelligence report, Mohammed bin Salman was named responsible for approving the operation that led to the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, a former writer for *The Washington Post*, though Prince Salaman denies all involvement in the assassination.<sup>7</sup> To the surprise of many, the new tour was able to redirect big-name golfers, such as Dustin Johnson, Phil Mickleson, Louis Oosthuizen and Kevin Na, from the PGA Tour to LIV, proving the tour's new-blown significance in the international golf world.<sup>8</sup> Mickleson, more than others, has received a load of backlash for his decision to participate in the tournament, including words of disdain from Tiger Woods, who is considered one of the greatest golfers of all time.<sup>9</sup>

And finally, rounding off the year is the 2022 football World Cup in Qatar, labeled by Amnesty International as the “Qatar World Cup of Shame.”<sup>10</sup> The tournament is scheduled to begin on November 20, 2022, and it will be the first World Cup hosted by a Middle Eastern

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<sup>5</sup> “Could 2022 be sportswashing’s biggest year?”

<sup>6</sup> “Phil Mickelson says he’s on the ‘winning side’ after joining the controversial LIV Golf series”

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> “What does LIV Golf stand for? Explaining the name, meaning of the Saudi-backed invitational tour”

<sup>9</sup> “Phil Mickelson was asked to skip British Open champions events over LIV Golf controversy”

<sup>10</sup> “Qatar World Cup of Shame”

nation. However, the choice of Qatar as the host nation for the tournament has raised some eyebrows due the methods it has used to build stadiums.<sup>11</sup> According to Amnesty International, migrants from Bangladesh, India, and Nepal are exploited, by being subjected to forced labor and prohibited from changing jobs.<sup>12</sup> Oftentimes, workers have to wait months before receiving any sort of financial compensation, all while “FIFA (football’s global governing body), its sponsors, and the construction companies involved are set to make massive financial gains from the tournament.”<sup>13</sup>

## II. UN ACTIONS

The UN has done much in hopes of advancing global efforts to tackle forced labor, such as with the 2014 Protocol to International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 29 on Forced Labor. “The Protocol and Recommendation mark a major step forward in the fight against forced labour and represent a firm commitment among governments, employer and worker organizations to eliminate contemporary forms of slavery,” ILO Director-General Guy Ryder said.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in the twenty-fourth session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2013, the council sought to find solutions to promote human rights through sport and the Olympic ideal. The council requested the Advisory Committee to prepare studies on how to use sport and the Olympic ideal to “promote human rights for all and to strengthen universal respect for them,” and collaborate with “States Members of the United Nations, international and regional organizations, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “Qatar Hosting The FIFA Men’s World Cup Comes With Controversy For Sponsors, Players And Fans”

<sup>12</sup> “Qatar World Cup of Shame”

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> “ILO adopts new Protocol to tackle modern forms of forced labour”

<sup>15</sup> “Sport and the Olympic ideal”

### III. QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

There are various ideas about how to mitigate the scale of sportswashing, and I hope to hear many different solutions during the committee session. Some questions that could help guide your plans are:

1. What are the causes—both immediate and underlying—of sportswashing? How can the initial spark of sportswashing be prevented?
2. Generally speaking, how effective is sportswashing?
3. Who should be responsible for the regulation of sportswashing?
  - a. How can nations hold each other accountable for the use of forced labor in the preparation for multinational sports events?
  - b. What repercussions should nations face for sportswashing?
4. What types of solutions would be the most effective and efficient?

### IV. HELPFUL RESOURCES

- <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/qatar>
- <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bradadgate/2022/10/17/qatar-hosting-the-fifa-mens-world-cup-comes-with-controversy-for-sponsors-players-and-fans/?sh=6a5c88ea56d8>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/jan/05/sportswashing-winter-olympics-world-cup>

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