



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### China's NBA Enes Kanter response raises Olympics concerns

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October 21, 2021

STATEMENT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET:

China's censorship of NBA broadcasts over a player's support for Tibet once again reveals China's lack of global responsibility and confirms the country is the wrong choice to host the upcoming Winter Olympics.

According to several news reports, Boston Celtics games vanished from the Chinese internet on Oct. 20, 2021 after Celtics player Enes Kanter called for a free Tibet on social media.

"Tibet belongs to Tibetans," Kanter says in a video he posted earlier that day. "I'm here to add my voice and speak out about what is happening in Tibet."

In the video, Kanter wears a t-shirt with an image of the Dalai Lama.

Kanter also posted photos of sneakers he wore to the Celtics season-opening game that night bearing the words "Free Tibet" along with an image of a Tibetan self-immolator. The design for the shoes apparently came from Badiuca, a Chinese political cartoonist and activist living in exile in Australia.

Kanter did not actually play in the game, which aired live on ESPN. The reason remains unclear.

### Oppression in Tibet

As Kanter says in the video, the Tibetan people's "basic rights and freedoms are not existent" under the authoritarian rule of the Chinese government, which has brutally occupied Tibet, a historically independent country, for more than 60 years since forcing the Dalai Lama into exile.

According to the Central Tibetan Administration, which provides democratic governance for Tibetans in exile, more than 1 million Tibetans have died as a direct result of China's invasion and occupation of their land.

Since 2009, more than 155 Tibetans have self-immolated, lighting their own bodies on fire in a desperate attempt to bring the world's attention to their plight.

The repression has gotten worse under current Chinese President Xi Jinping, whom Kanter decries in the video as a "brutal dictator."

Earlier this year, the watchdog group Freedom House declared Tibet the least-free country on Earth in a tie with Syria.

The Chinese government's policy of "Sinicization" is forcing Tibetans to assimilate into Chinese society by denying them their right to practice their own culture, religion and language.

"Simply owning a photo of the Dalai Lama in Tibet is grounds for arrest," Kanter points out in the video. "Even flying the Tibetan national flag can get you arrested."

“I say shame on the Chinese government,” Kanter continues. “The Chinese dictatorship is erasing Tibetan identity and culture.”

## **Courage and cowardice**

The International Campaign for Tibet commends Enes Kanter for his courage and moral clarity in speaking up for the people of Tibet.

Students for a Free Tibet and the Tibetan community in New York and New Jersey met with Kanter this week. Kanter says in the video that after learning about the oppression in Tibet, he “cannot stay silent.”

Kanter is not the first individual to see such reaction from the Chinese government, which claims to respect freedom of expression. Just two years ago, the NBA became embroiled in controversy after Daryl Morey, then-general manager of the Houston Rockets, tweeted an image saying, “Stand With Hong Kong.”

As a result, Chinese broadcasters quickly pulled NBA games off the air.

According to news reports, Tencent Sports in China still does not stream games of the Philadelphia 76ers, the team Morey now leads.

Tencent has also stopped streaming games of the Celtics, Kanter’s current team.

Kanter’s willingness to stand up to the Chinese government puts him in stark contrast to the NBA’s biggest star LeBron James who refused to criticize the Chinese government despite being outspoken about social and political issues in the United States.

Kanter also joins a long list of famous individuals who have taken the principled position to stand with the oppressed Tibetan people, including singer Björk and actor Harrison Ford.

## **Olympics concerns**

The Chinese government wishes to be seen as a leader on the international stage, yet it continues to violate international norms, not just in terms of respecting human rights but also accepting legitimate forms of protest. China’s hyper-sensitivity to any criticism over its blatant human rights violations in Tibet once again demonstrates that China has failed to assume the global responsibility expected of a country of its size and power.

If this is how China responds to a handful of social media posts from an NBA player who lives half the world away, one can only imagine the atmosphere of repression and censorship that will permeate Beijing’s hosting of the Winter Olympics in February 2022.

The International Olympic Committee now has the clear obligation to verify that China abides by its code of ethics and commitments, as ICT has previously said.

At a minimum, the committee must speak up, publicly and openly, without fear of reprisal, about the rights violations in Tibet, Xinjiang (which Uyghurs know as East Turkestan), Inner Mongolia, Hong Kong and elsewhere.

If the committee is unwilling to take meaningful action, it should revoke its decision to award the 2022 Games to Beijing. Anything less makes the committee culpable.

ICT also once again joins other civil society groups in calling for governments around the globe to commit to a diplomatic boycott of the Games.



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