

Friday marked the official start of the 2012 Summer Olympics where, for the first time in history, women from the Muslim nations of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Brunei were allowed to compete. The decision was made despite internal opposition from religious authorities, and was the result of unwavering support and pressure from many human rights organizations—in particular, Muslim organizations calling out the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for its hypocrisy.

### Why Hypocrisy?

The IOC charter states, "The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practicing a sport without discrimination of any kind ... Any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender, or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the Olympic Movement." This charter does not only pertain to the Olympic Games but to the laws within the participating country as well.

In 1964 the IOC referenced this rule when they banned South Africa from the Olympic Games, citing their discriminatory practices toward its Black citizens. Likewise, in 2000 Afghanistan was disqualified from the Olympics for its ban of female athletes. These are two clear examples of the IOC Charter enforcing its own regulations equally across the playing field.

As of a few weeks ago, Saudi Arabia was allowed by the IOC to join in the Olympic Games while being the only country that did not allow female athletes to participate. This over-sight by the IOC sparked the creation of a Muslim-based initiative out of Washington D.C. called **No Women No Play**, which played an important role in bringing together the diverse voices who believe Saudi Arabia should be expelled for violating the IOC Charter and human rights.

In Saudi Arabia, if you are a five year old girl kicking a ball down the street, it's considered 'cute'. If you're a 15 year old, it is 'haram' (forbidden). Unlike Saudi girls, boys in school have the luxury of a physical education program. Women are banned from participation in any athletic activity, are not allowed even a segregated sport, nor are allowed to attend a gym. The absolute farce is that these violations against girls and women are upheld on the basis of religion. The same religion that declares men and women are equals.

Even more ironically, during the reign of King Faisal in the 1960s, Saudi Arabia had physical education classes for girls and the genders were not rigidly segregated. Now these Olympian female athletes are called prostitutes. So what happened? Is there a new version of the Quran we don't know about?

In order for Saudi women to gain any rights, the women and men of Saudi Arabia will have to do so in the name of Islam, and fortunately there is an abundance of sacred texts from which to draw from.

From a Muslim standpoint, the barring of Saudi Arabia from the Olympics is a demand based on the Islamic value that men and women should be treated as equals. Saudi Arabia's concession to allow two female athletes to walk under the Saudi flag among men, unaccompanied by male guardians, and with their faces revealed, was the ultimate farce. It was a show put on to appease the masses and hide the true subordination of women that is allowed to continue under the guise of Islam.

For the longest time, the attitude toward Saudi Arabia by International institutions has been much like the commercial slogan, “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas”. This Olympics is a game changer. It has changed the tide in favor of Saudi women, and **No Women. No Play** will continue to drive that message home until a more egalitarian Islam takes root in Saudi Arabia.

Video statement by Muslim for Progressive Values:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5h1NY78eho&feature=plcp>

*“One of the tenets of Islam is to want for our brothers and sisters what we want for ourselves. In that spirit, we take issue of Saudi Arabia’s practice of discriminating against its women’s athletes.*

*We call on the President of the International Olympic Committee Mr. Jacques Rogge, to stay true to the precepts of the IOC Charter by barring Saudi Arabia from the Olympic Games until it ends its practice of prohibiting Saudi women from competing.” (July 15, 2011)*

Statement by Ali Al-Ahmed, the director of the Institute for Gulf Affairs in Washington:

[http://www.nowomennoplay.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=6:ban-women-athletes&catid=2:sports&Itemid=1](http://www.nowomennoplay.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6:ban-women-athletes&catid=2:sports&Itemid=1)

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