

Your Source For Iran Football News

Dear President Infantino,

We are writing on behalf of 60-million passionate and ardent fans of Perspolis, Esteghlal and Traktorsazi football clubs in Iran to plead with you to intervene in the current affairs of one of your member Confederations, The Asian Football Confederation.

We are writing directly to the office the FIFA President as we fear The Asian Football Confederation may yet again fail to deal with the interference of political authorities in the affairs of the Football Federations of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and now The United Arab Emirates.

The refusal of Saudi clubs to play Iranian clubs in the last two Asian Champions League seasons have not only deprived Iranian and Saudi fans, but also Asian football fans of witnessing this great rivalry before crowds of 100,000 at Tehran's Azadi Stadium and 60,000 plus at venues across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The recent events in our region and what seems to us an unjust blockade of the State of Qatar have dragged clubs from the United Arab Emirates and Qatar to this issue. With Oman the only plausible 'neutral' host, it will be impractical to proceed with the 2018 AFC Champions League groups stage match schedule. But this issue will have a devastating impact on West Asian football at large and not just next season's Asian Champions League that has come to fore as a result of the upcoming draw during the week of Monday, 4th December.

The United States severed its diplomatic ties with Iran in 1980, but both countries have continued a cordial sporting relationship throughout the past 37 years. You do remember the encounter between the two national teams in Lyon on 21st June 1998 when members of both teams posed in a joint team photo. FIFA recognized that sporting gesture and awarded both federations with its 1998 Fair Play Trophy.

The Iranian national team followed that up with a tour of The United States in January 2000 when they played three games in Southern California, culminated with a 'friendly' against the United States National Team.

While the France '98 draw pitted Iran and USA against each other in France, the highest political authorities in Iran and the United States had to work with each other to make that January 2000 friendly happen. There was a clear indication that both sides were trying a rapprochement. The clearest example of how football can have a positive impact on society at large.

Shortly after President Trump's Moslem ban in February 2017, Iranian fans warmly welcomed the United States Wrestling National team, with whom we have great rivalry, to Iran. The entire American wrestling delegation and even their families (from afar) acknowledged the hand of friendship extended to them through sports.

It is at these times of political and social uncertainty that we need Sports to step forward to bridge the gap and bring people together in the hope that governments too would reconsider their animosity towards one another.

With political tension in the Middle East at an all time high, certainly in our life time, and the latest chapter of Qatar facing an unjust blockade that seems to have extended to sports, the prospect of Asian Football competitions turning into a farce seem more real than ever before.

We have heard contradictory statements and remarks from various members of the Asian Football family following the conclusion of the latest round of the AFC competitions committee and ExCo meetings in Tokyo and Bangkok.

While the AFC seem determined to revive the home-and-away format of the Asian Champions League from the 2018 season, we have read statements made by Saudi and Emirati football officials with great concern that they would not allow their clubs to travel to Iran and Qatar.

We have already witnessed this to be put into practice, but with no great fanfare. The United Arab Emirates Under-16 team withdrew from their AFC U-16 preliminary four-team group, held in Qatar in September, in what clearly was a politically motivated gesture.

Saudi and Emirati members of the AFC Competitions Committee refused to attend their scheduled committee meeting in July, which was also held in Doha. Both Saudi and Emirati AFC Competition Committee members were in attendance in their most recent meetings in Tokyo.

We as fans have not heard whether the Asian Football Confederation disciplinary committee plans to deal with these clear violations of international football norms.

We, members of Iran's biggest football fan clubs and ardent supporters of our National Team, are ready to welcome Saudi, Emirati and Qatari clubs and their fans to Tehran's Azadi and Tabriz's Yadegar-Emam stadia with open arms. We hope to turn this in to a brotherly football rivalry that it should be.

Due to security concerns, FIFA ordered Iraq not to play their World Cup qualifying matches at home. Iraq chose Iran as their 'home' venue for their 'Road to Russia' campaign. Doha has also been home to another AFC member association - Yemen national team - for their FIFA World Cup and AFC Asian Cup qualifying matches.

Both Iran and Qatar have shown time and again that they are safe venues for any sporting competition at any level, however big or small.

In our region, Qatar has always been a gracious host dating all the way back to 1993 and since. Their hosting of the six-team round-robin USA '94 World Cup qualifying final stage, the 1995 Under-20 FIFA World Cup, the 2006 Asian Games and the 2011 AFC Asian Cup left all of us who attended these competitions with great memories of those events and in particular our host.

With the events of the last few months in our region in mind and the weight political authorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and The United Arab Emirates carry over their own appointed football administrators, we feel desperate to write to you.

As FIFA President you should also feel a sense of responsibility towards football fans around the world, especially regions where football has an incredible power to heal old wounds.

In addition, while these Asian Football competitions seem a matter of concern for the Asian Football Confederation, the fact is clear that all these competitions will eventually lead to FIFA's own tournaments. AFC U-16 and U-19 boys and girls tournaments are essentially qualifiers for their respective FIFA World Cup age group. AFC Champions League also acts as a qualifying competition for the FIFA Club World Cup. The same applies to the AFC Asian Cup whose champion will participate in the FIFA Confederations Cup.

These Asian tournaments are all part of the football pyramid. The pyramid summit will collapse if individual parts of its base are not in place.

The football officials in Saudi Arabia and The United Arab Emirates have openly stated that they cannot go against their respective political leaders' explicit directive that football teams (of any level) would not be permitted to travel to Iran and Qatar.

We would like to remind you of FIFA Statute Article 3 that states:

“Discrimination of any kind against a **Country**, private person or group of people on account of race, skin colour, ethnic, **national** or social **origin**, gender, language, religion, **political opinion** or **any other opinion**, wealth, birth or any other status, sexual orientation or **any other reason** is strictly prohibited and **punishable by suspension or expulsion.**”

The stand taken and statements made publicly by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates football officials, who are directed by their politicians and governments, are in clear violation of FIFA's Article 3 on several accounts. In addition, their stand is a clear violation of the independence of national governing bodies of football in Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E.

If they do not change their stated opinion and stand, they will leave FIFA with no choice but to take action, which according to Article Three of your Statutes is suspension or expulsion.

It would be a travesty of justice to see Saudi Arabia's national team being barred from the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia™, having reached the finals so deservedly following a 12-year absence.

The United Arab Emirates are the host of the 2019 AFC Asian Cup in just over thirteen months' time. With no end in sight for the current political crisis, will the United Arab Emirates political authorities be prepared to give up on the hosting of that tournament as they presumably would not welcome the national team of Qatar and their fans in contravention of the host country agreement that they would have had to sign with the Asian Football Confederation?

President Infantino: You have repeatedly stated and acknowledged the importance of fans in the development of football around the world. You have been true to your words by inviting fans from all corners of the world to Home of FIFA to listen to their opinion. We salute you for all these efforts. We cannot stress the constructive role of football in our region and hope your intervention can bring reason to decisions made by political authorities of the Middle Eastern countries.

We have been in support of your repeatedly stated goal of “**Let's Bring FOOTBALL back to FIFA.**”

We will forward your office with an interview clip of former Australian international – Aurelio Vidmar – whose recollection of their all-important France '98 intercontinental first leg playoff at Tehran's Azadi stadium in November 1997 should be your motivation to “**Bring Football Back to our HOME**”.

We do not wish you to respond to this letter. The time you may dedicate to doing so should be spent resolving the current impasse between the football families of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and The United Arab Emirates in a summit at the Home of FIFA in Zurich.

That action of yours will be the most comprehensive response you will provide us with and for which we will be eternally grateful.

Sent on behalf of 60-million football fans of Perspolis, Esteghlal and Traktor-Sazi football Clubs.