



UNITED STATES  
OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC  
COMMITTEE  
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Colorado Springs, CO 80909

**Statement of Sarah Hirshland  
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**Congressional Executive Commission on China (CECC) and  
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (TLHRC)  
Joint Hearing – China, Genocide and the Olympics  
May 18, 2021**

Chairmen Merkley, McGovern, and Smith:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written statement for the record on behalf of the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee for your hearing addressing China and the 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Beijing.

**The Tokyo Postponement**

Let me begin by addressing the rapidly approaching Olympic and Paralympic Summer Games in Tokyo. These upcoming Games open on July 23, 2021—a moment that will touch the lives of our athletes, their families, and, indeed, the entire world.

As you know, the Tokyo Games were postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was an unprecedented circumstance in the lives of our athletes. Many people will cheer these competitors on in July—and those cheers will be well deserved. Team USA athletes who were set to compete in Tokyo last year—and who, in many cases, had spent a lifetime in preparation—had to radically reconfigure their training, competition, and educational schedules after the Games were postponed. We remain, as ever, grateful for the support of their families, coaches, sponsors and others who helped them navigate this difficult period.

**The Magnitude of the Upcoming Olympics**

For so many Team USA athletes and all athletes, the Olympic and Paralympic Games represent the culmination of their athletic careers. And for the athletes competing in the upcoming Olympic and Paralympic contests in Tokyo and Beijing, that goes double: They will have managed not only to make the team, but also to maintain their preparation and focus amid a global pandemic.

I cannot emphasize enough that there may be no more impactful Olympic and Paralympic Games than the contests ahead in Tokyo and Beijing. Watching the world's Olympians and Paralympians compete at both the upcoming Summer and Winter Games will be an inspiring human achievement—one that will bring people together from around the world after a year in which we separated ourselves from even our own families and neighbors for the sake of health and safety.

The lighting of the Olympic and Paralympic torches in Tokyo and Beijing will mean more to us as a global community and as a nation than it ever has.

## **The Beijing Games and Our Opposition to a Boycott**

So many members of Congress have been staunch advocates for our athletes and their families throughout the past year, and we honor and appreciate everything the country has done to support our athletes. We understand a few members of Congress have called for Team USA to boycott the 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Beijing and are understandably concerned about the conduct of the Chinese, including the oppression of the Uyghur population, which the United States has designated a genocide.

This situation in China troubles us as well. The USOPC does not condone actions that undermine the core values of the Olympic movement—values that include diversity, peace, and respect for human dignity. However, we believe that an athlete boycott of the Olympic and Paralympic Games is certainly not the answer.

Past Olympic boycotts have failed to achieve political ends—and they should give all of us pause in considering another boycott. In 1980, the U.S. government pushed for an athlete boycott of the 1980 Olympic Summer Games in Moscow as a way of pressuring the Soviet Union into leaving Afghanistan. As a result, 461 American athletes—the balance of them teenagers and college students representing almost every U.S. state—qualified to compete in Moscow only to have the opportunity taken from them. Many never had another chance to be a part of Team USA and to compete at an Olympic Games.

What makes matters worse is that their sacrifice did not even achieve the government's policy goals: the Soviet Union stayed in Afghanistan for nearly another decade. In retaliation, the Soviet government kept its athletes home from the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Team USA athletes and coaches from the 1980 and 1984 cohort have spoken movingly and powerfully in recent months about the damaging effects of these boycotts on athletes, their families, and the Olympic movement.

We urge you to listen to these voices, which include Olympic medal winners, coaches, and supporters of Team USA. Team USA athletes have sacrificed a great deal for the chance to compete in the 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Beijing—and we believe they should be given the chance to compete on behalf of the United States on the global stage. The American public supports this view. A recent Morning Consult poll showed that an overwhelming two-thirds of Americans oppose calls for a boycott of the 2022 Olympic Winter Games.

## **An Opportunity to Showcase America's Best**

There are those who argue that American athletes attending the Games in Beijing give credence to a government that is engaging in actions that violate our country's most deeply-cherished principles. But I would urge them to look at Olympic and Paralympic contests differently: as a chance for our athletes to serve as the ultimate ambassadors and beacons of our country's values.

Consider, for instance, the 1980 Olympic Winter Games. In Lake Placid, the U.S. Hockey team bested the heavily-favored Soviet hockey team in what is proudly referred to today as "The Miracle on Ice." That victory inspired our nation and stood as testament to the power of democracy and freedom. It ranks among the most celebrated moments in our nation's sporting history.

Our values can find more direct expression at the Olympic and Paralympic Games as well, including drawing needed attention to human rights issues. Prior to the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, Russia passed anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, a move that was met with broad global condemnation from participating athletes and nations alike. The Olympic and Paralympic community shone a light on this inequality, and the Sochi Games became a turning point in the effort to highlight the contributions and inclusion of LGBTQ+ athletes in global sport.

Time and again, the Olympics has enabled Team USA to showcase the values that make our country strong and respected: our belief in fair competition; our commitment to the dignity of all people; and our support of the hard work and lifelong commitment of athletes from every state in the nation.

### **Supporting Team USA**

Today, a new generation of American Winter Olympians and Paralympians are hard at work preparing to represent America in Beijing in 2022. After a year of uncertainty and disruption, these proud American athletes deserve our support and our appreciation. At a time of great difficulty, they have trained hard and sacrificed much.

Thankfully, many throughout the country have helped our athletes enormously over the past year. Our Olympic and Paralympic sponsors are a critical example of that support. They make possible our athletes' training and travel and help ensure that the United States is well-represented in global competition. As you know, unlike most of our international competitors, Team USA depends on private funding to succeed on the global stage. The USOPC and Team USA are entirely privately funded. Our sponsors have stepped up for the athletes for decades, and for that we are most grateful.

We are determined to adhere to our mission to support our athletes who have dedicated themselves to their sport, their teams, and their communities. We appreciate your consideration and your continued support of Team USA, and we look forward to celebrating the hard-fought competitions and medal-winning performances of our athletes and your constituents at both the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo and the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Beijing.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a statement for the record for this joint hearing. I hope my statement has been helpful and that it shares a vital perspective of Team USA athletes.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Hirshland  
Chief Executive Officer  
United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee