



PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

FRIDAY, 15 FEBRUARY, 1980

JOINT PRESS STATEMENT

The Prime Minister, the Minister for Home Affairs, and the members of the National Executive of the Australian Olympic Federation, met today to discuss the question of Australia's participation in the Olympic Games, and to create an opportunity for an exchange of views in relation to the Prime Minister's statement that the Government will remain strongly opposed to the participation of an Australian team in the Olympic Games in Moscow.

The Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs explained that the Government had given further consideration to the Government's attitude to the holding of the Olympic Games in Moscow in the light of the views expressed and discussions held by the Prime Minister in the course of his recent visit to the United States and Europe. The Government's position that it would be inappropriate for the Games to be held in Moscow was conveyed both in the discussions this morning and in a letter to the Federation, a copy of which is attached to this release.

The Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs expressed the view that, as a matter of principle, an Australian team should not participate, for reasons that were discussed very fully at the meeting.

The Australian Olympic Federation explained that they were concerned as to whether a withdrawal by Australia or a number of nations would constitute an effective boycott, and the President of the Olympic Federation did not feel that Australia should withdraw unless it was established beyond reasonable doubt that an effective boycott would take place.

The members of the Australian Olympic Federation Executive explained to the Prime Minister that any decision for the withdrawal of the Australian team could only be made by a full conference of the Federation, the members of which would comprise representatives of all the national controlling Unions of sports printed in the Games Programme, and the State Olympic Councils. The next scheduled conference, which takes into account team nominations, and other factors, is to be held on 19 April and, because of the rules, it could not be held before that time.

All participants found the discussions this morning constructive and useful. The Government has taken note of the points made by the Federation. For its part, the Federation has indicated that it will be watching future developments very closely and will be giving serious consideration to the views that the Government has put.

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PRIME MINISTER

CANBERRA

Dear Mr. Grange,

I refer to my letter of 22 January last and to Mr. Staley's letter of 5 February regarding the holding of the XXII Olympic Games in Moscow.

You will be aware that since 22 January, I have had discussions in the United States and Europe with the leaders of the United States, United Kingdom, West Germany and France regarding the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its serious effects on world peace. In part, those discussions have covered the boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow.

On my return, I reported to Cabinet on the result of those discussions and Cabinet gave further consideration to its attitude to holding the Games in Moscow.

The Government has strongly reaffirmed the view expressed in my letter of 22 January that if Soviet troops do not withdraw from Afghanistan as proposed by President Carter, Moscow will be an unsuitable site for the Games. The Government is also strongly of the view that it would not be in the national interest of Australia for Australians to participate in Games held in Moscow and therefore asks that, in the event of the Soviet not withdrawing from Afghanistan, no Australian team be sent to Moscow.

For if an Australian team were to go, they would be used politically by the Soviet Union - whatever our athletes did or said in Moscow. The Soviet Government would represent the participation of Australian and other athletes as a political triumph for the Soviet Union. Indeed, the Soviet Union has now been describing the holding of the Games in Moscow as "convincing proof of the universal recognition of the historical importance and correctness of the course of our country's foreign policy, the vast contribution of the Soviet Union to the struggle for peace". It is thus the Soviet Union which is insisting, not just on mixing sport and politics, but that sport is politics. Australia and Australians should not be party to this violation of the Olympic ideal.

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Before you come to a final view, I would like you to ask yourselves what, in your view, would be sufficient cause for the Games to be moved, or have Australians not attend. Is it that an invasion in Afghanistan is not a sufficient invasion? Have the Soviets not used enough troops to give sufficient cause? Or is the population of Afghanistan too small for it to matter enough? How many Soviet troops would need to be used in that invasion, occupation and suppression before Moscow, in your view, would become an inappropriate site? If the invasion were of a country closer to Australia, or closer to Europe, would that alter your judgment? I ask these questions because I am sure you will agree with me that at some point, an invasion, occupation and suppression of a people would be sufficient cause for an abandonment of the Games.

I hope that the Australian Olympic Federation will reflect on all this, and go on to ask themselves whether, with the benefit of hindsight, any Olympic officials or athletes would have gone to Berlin in 1936 had they known the propaganda use to which their presence would be put. The Government believes that there can be only one answer, and that the Australian people share that belief.

At the same time, the Australian Government is very sympathetic to the predicament in which our athletes find themselves, through no fault of their own. With this in mind, the Government is, as you know, pursuing initiatives with the United States, and other Governments who share a similar view, to provide an alternative site for the XXII Olympiad or, if the Olympic Games are not moved, to provide a site or sites for games where high-level international competition can be had with the athletes of other like-minded nations. The Government is prepared to make a substantial financial contribution in order to ensure that such competition would be available.

Yours sincerely,

(Malcolm Fraser)

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