



PRIME MINISTER

15 JUNE, 1980

LETTER TO A.O.F.

The Prime Minister met officials of the Australian Olympic Federation in Melbourne on Friday.

Attached is the text of a letter given to the President of the AOF, Mr. S.B. Grange, O.B.E., M.V.O.



PRIME MINISTER

CANBERRA

13 June, 1980

Dear Mr. Grange,

It was a matter of great regret to the Government that the Executive of the Australian Olympic Federation decided at its meeting of 23 May that an Australian team should participate in the Moscow Olympic Games.

The Government has stressed the high interests of national security that are involved in this question. The Government has explained the need to prevent the free and independent world making the same mistakes in the 1980s as were made in the latter part of the 1930s. Members of the AOF and of sports administrations who lived through World War II would need no reminding of the need for resolute action in the face of aggression.

The Government's attitude to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan needs to be seen against the background of subversion, expansion and aggression caused by the Soviet Union over many years. Apart from their activities in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union or its surrogates have acted in Angola, Yemen, Ethiopia, Indo-China and Afghanistan - to this point, the last and worst of their aggressions.

The Government is deeply concerned that the Soviet Union spends more on armaments as a percentage of GNP than did Nazi Germany in 1938, and twice as much as does the United States of America.

Against this background, the Government has pressed the view that the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan requires a resolute response from Australia, and that, as an important part of that response, an Australian team should not be present at the Moscow Olympics. Now it appears that some members of the AOF Executive, in exercising their independent right to make a decision in these matters, have decided to place their perceived duty to the International Olympic movement above their duty to Australia, and to all Australians. The Government cannot accept that such a decision would be taken if there were a proper understanding of all the factors involved.

In any case, since that decision there have been important changes in circumstances both in Australia and overseas, which in addition to the continuing Soviet occupation of Afghanistan provide sound reasons for reversing the decision.

A number of sporting bodies and individual sportsmen and women have decided to withdraw from the Australian Olympic contingent. The team is no longer the best that Australia can field. This is a reflection of the growing community view that Australian sportsmen and women should not take part in the Moscow Games.

Significantly, almost all sporting bodies in New Zealand have withdrawn from the Moscow Games. I understand only four members remain in the original team. 'De facto' there is no New Zealand team.

This brings me to a serious point. Australia is now isolated in our region. China, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and de facto New Zealand will not be attending.

In deciding to attend the Moscow Games, Australia is virtually alone in the region, in company with only communist Laos, communist Vietnam and communist North Korea. I have to say that I find that a shameful position to be in.

The AOF Executive decision ignores the national interest and clearly its thinking is not shared by all those other governments in our region and by many others, not least by a majority of Australian citizens themselves.

The AOF Executive has effectively isolated Australia from our regional allies and partners, and from many of our most important traditional friends. Let me put it to you personally, and through you to the Executive, that Australia as an independent nation with an unqualified record in defence of liberty and the right to be free, has a bounden duty to support other free and independent nations. To fail to do so is to deny our history. Moreover, there is a specific and urgent need for Australia, as an ally of the United States, to support the world's greatest free power and our ally. Each of these grounds standing alone should be sufficient. Both together represent an overwhelming argument to which the AOF must respond.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was totally without justification. It was an affront to the principle of the independence and sovereignty of nations, and clearly in contempt of the Charter of the United Nations. It has been condemned by the United Nations General Assembly and the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, by the House of Commons, by the Parliament of Europe and by many others. Despite this, the invasion is continuing, with widespread bloodshed and brutality.

A united response by all freedom-loving countries to the Soviet aggression is vital if we are to demonstrate that the will and resolve exists to make them pay a high price for their continued occupation of Afghanistan. It is necessary to prevent further Soviet moves which would take the world closer to war. A lack of such resolve would undoubtedly have serious consequences for world peace and put at risk the national security of all free and independent nations, with whom Australia must stand.

The Government, along with other like-minded countries, cannot understand how a country engaged in the invasion, occupation and suppression of another nation could be a fit host for the Olympic Games. It is generally accepted that the Soviet Union sees the Games as a means of demonstrating widespread approval of its foreign policy. In going to Moscow our athletes will be portrayed by the Soviet Union as in sympathy with Soviet foreign policies. But a foreign policy that results in the invasion and brutal repression of another people is one that is abhorrent to the great majority of Australians.

As I have said on many occasions recently, the Government has no wish to penalise athletes. Nevertheless, we should not place athletes above all other young Australians. Nor should sports officials place themselves and athletes above other Australians. Sports officials in exercising the right to make the decision on whether to go to Moscow must concede that there is a responsibility to Australia which transcends other responsibilities.

A boycott of the Moscow Olympic Games will demonstrate to the Soviet people the world-wide condemnation of their country's invasion of Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the controls on the Soviet media, a boycott will be visible and the reasons for it will be brought home to the Soviet people.

Chancellor Schmidt, Prime Minister Thatcher and Prime Minister Trudeau have written to me recently re-affirming their position on the importance of a boycott of the Moscow Games. Mr. Trudeau emphasised that there is no sign that the Soviet Union is about to reconsider its policy of aggression in Afghanistan. He pointed out that there is thus more reason to ensure that the

boycott of the Moscow Games is supported by as many as the world's governments and international Olympic Committees as possible. Mr. Trudeau makes it plain that it is his view that a boycott is an effective instrument that the world can use to say plainly to the Soviet Union that its military adventurism stands condemned.

Similar views have been put recently by the Soviet human rights activist and Nobel Prizewinner, Andrei Sakharov, who said, in the context of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, that 'the broadest possible boycott of the Moscow Olympics is necessary. Every spectator or athlete who comes to the Olympics will be giving indirect support to Soviet military policies'.

My Government wants no part in this. Neither does the majority of the Australian people.

In these circumstances and against the background of the effective boycott of the Moscow Games by many important sporting countries, I ask you, on behalf of the Government, to institute whatever action is necessary for your Executive to review and reverse its decision concerning participation by an Australian team. Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour and the advanced state of preparation, it is imperative that this should be done.

I ask all members of the Executive as plainly and bluntly as possible to place their national duty first.

This letter has been firmly argued. That is deliberately so. In uncertain times, no national leader can guarantee world peace and freedom from war. Weakness and irresolution will bring war measurably closer. There can be no apology for and no appeasement with aggressors. What I can guarantee is that whatever hold the world now has on peace will be made measurably more secure by Australian support of the Olympic boycott.

I expect you to place Australia first.

Yours sincerely,

MALCOLM FRASER

(Malcolm Fraser)

Mr. S.B. Grange, O.B.E., M.V.O.,
President,
Australian Olympic Federation.