

Request on Refugee Applications of those concerned in Olympic and Paralympic Games

To The International Olympic Committee,
To The International Paralympic Committee,

July 22, 2021

Shogo Watanabe, Representative, Japan Lawyers Network for Refugees

I would like to make the following request.

Purpose of Request

1. In order to prevent situations that are contrary to the refugee support philosophy of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, which is to be held in 2021, from occurring related to the Games, your organization should pay attention to the situation and provide necessary advice and recommendations to the organizations concerned.
2. In particular, we request that when athletes and related persons who come to Japan for the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games (hereinafter referred to as "athletes, etc.") express their intention to apply for refugee status, pay attention to the situation and provide necessary advice and recommendations on the opportunity to apply for refugee status and undergo examination without direct contact with officials of the home country embassy.

Reason of Request

1. Factual Background

- 1.1. According to media reports, on July 16, 2021, Julius Setitreko, a member of the Ugandan delegation (hereinafter referred to as "the Athlete"), disappeared from the pre-Olympic training camp for the Tokyo Olympics, but was found on July 20. The following day, on the 21st of the same month, he expressed his intention to apply for refugee status at the Shibuya Police Station in Tokyo. However, after being persuaded by the Ugandan embassy staff, he agreed to return to Uganda and left Japan from Narita Airport on the same night¹.
- 1.2. Shortly before 3:00 p.m. on July 21, Koichi Kodama, a lawyer who is a sponsor of our Network,

¹ https://news.tbs.co.jp/newseye/tbs_newseye4320186.html

² <https://www.news24.jp/articles/2021/07/21/04909633.html>

saw the news report and visited the Shibuya police station and requested a meeting with the athlete in order to help him apply for refugee status. However, an assistance police inspector of the Osaka police office said, "He has not applied for refugee status. (When Kodama asked the inspector if he was here, which airport he was going to, and whether he was told that Kodama wanted to meet him) I can't answer anything other than that." Then the inspector refused even to arrange a meeting.

2. Action to be taken

- 2.1. Although the direct motive of the Athlete is not clear, it is important to note that a person who intends to apply for refugee status should be given the opportunity to do so.

Unfortunately, there are many dictatorial and repressive regimes in the world, and people are subjected to arbitrary punishments simply because they are considered to have different political opinions³. Depending on the situation in their home countries, the fact that they were sent to represent the country in the Olympic Games but disappeared at one time may be considered as having engaged in anti-government activities and face risk of being punished severely.

- 2.2. In such a situation, when athletes, etc. express their intention to apply for refugee status, it would be unacceptable to have them interviewed by a representative of the home embassy and leave it to the embassy representative to encourage them to change their mind. It is as if a victim of domestic violence who has sought protection from the police is allowed to meet the perpetrator and persuade him or her to return home and it should not be allowed at all.
- 2.3. In particular, your organization is committed to the principle of supporting refugees by allowing refugee teams to participate in the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

It goes without saying that no one should be deprived of the opportunity to seek protection as a refugee in the same place.

In order to realize the principles of this Games, we believe it is necessary to ensure that those who have the intention to apply for refugee status are appropriately treated.

Japan Lawyer Network for Refugees

Izumibashi Law Office Yotsuya Plaza Building 4F, 1-18-6 Yotsuya, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0004,
Japan

Tel: (+81)3-5312-4827 Fax: (+81)3-5312-4543 E-mail: jlnr@izumibashi-law.net

³ The U.S. Department of State reports on the human rights situation in Uganda that there have been several cases of Ugandan security forces arbitrarily killing people they consider to be rebels.