

Guidelines on Athlete Expression – Olympic Winter Games Milano-Cortina 2026

Introduction by the IOC Athletes' Commission

As athletes, we are passionate about our sports and achieving our sporting performance goals. For each and every one of us, that passion continues into everyday life, where we advocate change on issues of great importance to us and our world. That desire to drive change can naturally make it very tempting to use the platform of an appearance at the Olympic Games to make our point.

However, all of us are at the Olympic Games because, one day, we dreamt of being an Olympian and maybe even an Olympic champion. The unique nature of the Olympic Games enables athletes from all over the world to come together in peace and harmony. We believe that the example we set by competing with the world's best at the Olympic Games and staying in the Olympic Village while respecting each other's differences is a uniquely positive message to send to an increasingly divided world.

The IOC Athletes' Commission and the IOC are fully supportive of freedom of expression. This is highlighted in the [Athletes' Rights and Responsibilities Declaration](#), which emphasises the centrality of non-discrimination, equality, freedom of expression and due process in the Olympic Movement. Building on the results of our consultation with more than 3,500 athletes prior to the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, the IOC has clarified the opportunities for athlete expression during the Olympic Games. The present Guidelines reflect the same principles, taking into account the changes of the Olympic Charter decided by the 141st IOC Session in October 2023.

The IOC Athletes' Commission

Questions & Answers

What does the Olympic Charter say?

The Olympic Charter states the Fundamental Principles of Olympism (attached as Schedule 1 to these Guidelines), Rules and Bye-laws adopted by the IOC. It governs the organisation, action and operation of the Olympic Movement and sets out the conditions for the celebration of the Olympic Games.

Rule 40.2 of the Olympic Charter states that: “All competitors, team officials or other team personnel in the Olympic Games shall enjoy freedom of expression in keeping with the Olympic values and the Fundamental Principles of Olympism, and in accordance with the Guidelines determined by the IOC Executive Board.”

Rule 50.2 of the Olympic Charter provides for the protection of neutrality of sport at the Olympic Games and the neutrality of the Olympic Games themselves. It states that: “No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas.”

This document constitutes the relevant Guidelines referenced in Rule 40.2 of the Olympic Charter as approved by the IOC Executive Board to apply to competitors, team officials or other team personnel participating in the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 (“**Participants**”).

Why does this Rule exist and what does it aim to achieve?

The focus at the Olympic Games must remain on athletes’ performances, sport and the international unity and harmony that the Olympic Games seek to advance.

Athletes at the Olympic Games are part of a global community with many different views, lifestyles and values. The mission of the Olympic Games to bring the entire world together can facilitate understanding of different views, but this can be accomplished only if everybody respects this diversity.

It is a fundamental principle that sport at the Olympic Games is neutral and must be separate from political, religious or any other type of interference. Specifically, the focus on the field of play during competitions and official ceremonies must be on celebrating athletes’ performances; and the Olympic Village shall provide respectful conditions for all athletes to live together.

There is a need to respect other athletes living in the Olympic Village and their moment of glory at the Olympic Games. Athletes’ expressions on the field of play during competitions or official ceremonies may distract the focus from the celebration of athletes’ sporting performances.

The Rule is also aimed at protecting Participants from the potential consequences of being placed in a position where they may be forced to take a public position on a particular domestic or international issue regardless of their beliefs.

Do Participants have the opportunity to express their views during the Olympic Games?

Yes, of course. It should be noted that expressing views outside Olympic sites/venues and before and/or after the Olympic Games is not subject to these Guidelines.

During the Olympic Games, Participants also have the opportunity to express their views, including:

- In the mixed zones, including when speaking to the media
- In the International Broadcasting Centre (IBC) or the Main Media Centre (MMC), including when speaking to the media
- During press conferences in the venue or in the MMC
- During interviews
- At team meetings
- In traditional media or digital media
- Through social media channels
- On the field of play prior to the start of the competition (i.e. after leaving the “call room” (or similar area) or during the introduction of the individual athlete or team) provided that the expression (for example, gesture) is:
 - (i) consistent with the Fundamental Principles of Olympism;
 - (ii) not targeted, directly or indirectly, against people, countries, organisations and/or their dignity;
 - (iii) not disruptive (by way of example only, the following expressions are considered disruptive: expressions during another athlete’s or team’s national anthem and/or introduction, as this may interfere with such other athlete’s or team’s concentration on and/or preparation for the competition; physical interference with the introduction of another athlete or team or the protocol itself (for example by unfurling a flag, a banner etc.); causing (or assuming the risk of causing) physical harm to persons or property, etc.); and
 - (iv) not prohibited or otherwise limited by the rules of the relevant National Olympic Committee (NOC) and/or the competition regulations of the relevant International Federation (IF).

When expressing their views, Participants are expected to respect the Olympic values and their fellow athletes and other Participants. It should be recognised that any behaviour and/or expression that constitutes or signals discrimination, hatred, hostility or the potential for violence on any basis whatsoever is contrary to the Fundamental Principles of Olympism. Participants, just like any other individuals, shall also consider applicable laws when expressing their views.

Are there any limitations?

Yes, expressions are not permitted in the following instances:

- During official ceremonies (including Olympic medal ceremonies, opening and closing ceremonies)
- During competition on the field of play
- In the Olympic Village

What happens if a Participant does not respect these Guidelines?

1. The Participant or team of Participants (as the case may be) and their NOC may be subject to the IOC's disciplinary proceedings, in accordance with the Olympic Charter.
2. Consistent with the principles of due process, evaluation of cases by the IOC will involve full transparency to the extent permitted by others' rights to privacy and will respect the right to be heard. In the event that an athlete is concerned by the case, the IOC Disciplinary Commission evaluating the allegation and its consequences will include an athlete representative who is a member of the IOC Athletes' Commission.
3. The evaluation of behaviours and determination of potential disciplinary consequences by the IOC will take into account relevant factors, which may include the following:
 - A. The degree of disruption caused by the behaviour on the field of play, during an official ceremony or in the Olympic Village.
 - B. Whether the expression constituted advocacy subject to prohibition under international human rights law, such as national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.
 - C. Whether disciplinary action is necessary in order to protect the legitimate interests and values of Olympism.
 - D. Whether the expression was a one-time event.
 - E. Whether the Participant subject to disciplinary proceedings carried out the act voluntarily or at the behest of or under pressure from another person, organisation or entity.
 - F. Whether another Participant (e.g. another athlete) complained about the expression.
4. Disciplinary consequences for Participants may be as set out in the Olympic Charter and will depend in part on the findings of the above evaluation. Participants may expect that any sanction will be proportionate to the level of disruption and the degree to which the infraction is not compatible with the Olympic values, including the Fundamental Principles of Olympism.

Schedule 1

Fundamental Principles of Olympism (excerpt from the Olympic Charter)

1. Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for internationally recognised human rights and universal fundamental ethical principles within the remit of the Olympic Movement.
2. The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.
3. The Olympic Movement is the concerted, organised, universal and permanent action, carried out under the supreme authority of the IOC, of all individuals and entities who are inspired by the values of Olympism. It covers the five continents. It reaches its peak with the bringing together of the world's athletes at the great sports festival, the Olympic Games. Its symbol is five interlaced rings.
4. The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have access to the practice of sport, without discrimination of any kind in respect of internationally recognised human rights within the remit of the Olympic Movement. The Olympic spirit requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play.
5. Recognising that sport occurs within the framework of society, sports organisations within the Olympic Movement shall apply political neutrality. They have the rights and obligations of autonomy, which include freely establishing and controlling the rules of sport, determining the structure and governance of their organisations, enjoying the right of elections free from any outside influence and the responsibility for ensuring that principles of good governance be applied.
6. The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Olympic Charter shall be secured without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.
7. Belonging to the Olympic Movement requires compliance with the Olympic Charter and recognition by the IOC.