

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
CONNECTICUT

COMMITTEES:

AGING

ARMED SERVICES

COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

JUDICIARY

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

706 HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

(202) 224-2823

FAX: (202) 224-9673

90 STATE HOUSE SQUARE, TENTH FLOOR
HARTFORD, CT 06103

(860) 258-6940

FAX: (860) 258-6958

915 LAFAYETTE BOULEVARD, ROOM 230
BRIDGEPORT, CT 06604

(203) 330-0598

FAX: (203) 330-0608

<http://blumenthal.senate.gov>

April 19, 2017

Gianni Infantino
President
Fédération Internationale de Football Association
FIFA-Strasse 20
P.O. Box 8044 Zurich, Switzerland

Dear Mr. Infantino:

I urge you to reconsider the decision to host the 2018 World Cup in Russia. The government of the host nation, led by Vladimir Putin, has taken repeated actions completely inconsistent with the humanitarian values of FIFA. Your organization rightly acknowledges it has "a duty to society that goes beyond football." That duty must include recognizing Russia is an unsuitable host nation, given its role enabling gross violations of international law in Syria.

Russia is a close ally of the Assad regime, intervening militarily on its side in the civil war and stationing troops there in support of Assad. The chemical attack the world witnessed in Khan Sheikhoun, Syria, on April 4th, 2017, revealed the reality of Russia's complicity in violating the Geneva Conventions and the laws of armed conflict.

Despite Russia's 2013 commitment to remove all chemical weapons from Syria, Putin allowed Assad to conceal dangerous reserves and reconstitute the capability to use them—actions certainly evident to the Russian forces who were operating at the same air base used to launch the deadly sarin gas attack. The results were horrific. Babies and children choking, gasping for breath, foaming at the mouth. A young father cradling the lifeless bodies of his nine month old twins. Rather than join the international community to hold Assad accountable for this intolerable attack, the Russian government is helping cover up this war crime.

The United States is investigating the presence of a Russian drone during the chemical attack and the subsequent airstrike by a Russian-made aircraft on the very hospital tending to the wounded victims, many of them children – itself a further violation of the law of armed conflict. This violation of the Geneva Protocol that prohibits chemical weapons and the Chemical Weapons Convention occurred just days after Russia vetoed for the seventh time a UN resolution to sanction Assad and stop the supply of the Russian-made helicopters that drop chemical weapons and barrel bombs on civilians. After the chemical attack, Russia again vetoed international efforts to end the war in Syria. I urge you to not turn a blind eye to these facts.

Putin will seek to use the World Cup to distract Russians from his illegal international actions in the lead up to his own re-election campaign next year. FIFA must stand up for the values of soccer players and fans around the globe by rejecting Russia as a host country.

I recognize the courage and leadership this action requires of you. I believe that the other nations that bid to host the 2018 World Cup and the United States Soccer Federation would assist in the location of a suitable alternative venue. I look forward to your swift reply to my request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Blumenthal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "R".

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate