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The Honourable Irwin Cotler, P.C., O.C., M.P., Mount Royal
L'honorable Irwin Cotler, C.P., O.C., député, Mont-Royal

Montréal, Thursday, August 9, 2012.

Count Dr. Jacques Rogge
President
International Olympic Committee
Château de Vidy
C.P. 356 – CH-1007
Lausanne, Switzerland

Dear Doctor Rogge:

I am writing you as a Member of the Canadian Parliament and mover of a parliamentary motion which was unanimously passed by the Canadian House of Commons on June 13, 2012. The motion, which called for a moment of silence at the 2012 London Olympics in memory of those Israeli Olympians killed 40 years ago – where you yourself were an Olympic athlete - read as follows:

That the House offers its support for a moment of silence to be held at the 2012 London Olympics in memory of those killed 40 years ago in the tragic terrorist events of the 1972 Munich Olympics wherein 11 Israeli athletes were murdered.

Indeed, civil society groups, Parliaments and political leaders around the world have been calling on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to hold a moment of silence at the London Games, with the Canadian Parliament the first to unanimously support this call – an expression of our responsibility to remember – *le devoir de mémoire*.

Nor is such a memorial, as you best know, without precedent. Two years ago during the Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver, the IOC, observed a moment of silence – over which you presided, appropriately enough – in memory of the Georgian athlete, Nodar Kumaritashvili, who died tragically in a training accident. Ten years ago, in 2002, the IOC memorialized the victims of 9/11, though that terrorist atrocity neither occurred during the Olympic Games nor had any connection to them. The duty of remembrance was justification enough.

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In particular, after eschewing a memorial for the murdered Israeli athletes and coaches at this year's opening ceremony, the IOC then – and again, rightly – memorialized the victims of the 2005 London Bombings (as it happens, I was in London at the time visiting as Minister of Justice), though this terrorist atrocity, as well, had no nexus to the Olympic Games.

The refusal of the IOC, therefore, to observe a moment of silence on the 40th anniversary of the Munich massacre – the slaughter of 11 Israeli athletes and coaches for no other reason than that they were Israelis and Jews – is as offensive as it is incomprehensible. These eleven (11) Israeli Olympians were part of the Olympic family, they were murdered as members of the Olympic family, they should be remembered by the Olympic family at these Olympic Games themselves.

This steadfast reluctance not only ignores – but mocks – the calls for a moment of silence by Government leaders, including US President Barack Obama, Australian PM Julia Gillard, Canadian Foreign Minister John Baird, and most recently by his Excellency the Canadian Governor General David Johnston; the calls by various Parliaments including resolutions by the US Congress as well as by Canadian, Australian, German, Italian and UK Parliamentarians; and the sustained international public campaign and anguished civil society appeals.

As well, the IOC decision ignores that the Munich massacre occurred at the Olympic games not *par hasard*, but precisely because the Olympic games provided a venue of international resonance for such an attack; the decision ignores that, as *Der Spiegel* put it, the killings were facilitated by the criminal negligence and indifference of Olympic security officials themselves; and finally, and most disturbingly, it ignores and mocks the plaintive pleas – and pain and suffering – of the families and loved ones, for whom the remembrance of these last forty years is an over-riding personal and moral imperative, as expressed to you yet again in London this week.

Accordingly, it is not hard to infer – as many have done - that not only were the athletes killed because they were Israeli and Jewish, but that the moment of silence is being denied them also because they are Israeli and Jewish. Professor Deborah Lipstadt – a distinguished historian of antisemitism and one normally understated in her attribution of anti-Jewish or anti-Israel motifs - makes the connection. In her words:

“The IOC’s explanation is nothing more than a pathetic excuse. The athletes who were murdered were from Israel and were Jews—that is why they aren’t being remembered. ... This was the greatest tragedy to ever occur during the Olympic Games. Yet the IOC has made it quite clear that these victims are not worth 60 seconds. Imagine for a moment that these athletes had been from the United States, Canada, Australia, or even Germany No one would think twice about commemorating them. But these athletes came from a country and a people who somehow deserve to be victims. Their lost lives are apparently not worth a minute.”

As Ankie Spitzer, widow of the murdered Andre Spitzer put it, regretfully, “I can only come to one conclusion or explanation: This is discrimination. I have never used that word in 40 years, but the victims had the wrong religions, they came from the wrong country.”

Dr. Rogge, you, as a bearer of memory as a Belgian Olympian yourself in the 1972 Munich Games, have poignantly remarked just days ago, “the Munich attack cast terrorism's dark shadow on the Olympic Games. It was a direct assault on the core values of the Olympic movement.”

This Sunday, when the London 2012 Olympic Games conclude, let us pause to remember and recall each of the murdered athletes. Each had a name, an identity, a family – each person was a universe:

Moshe Weinberg
Yossef Romano
Ze'ev Friedman
David Berger
Yakov Springer
Eliezer Halfin
Yossef Gutfreund
Kehat Shorr
Mark Slavin
Andre Spitzer
Amitzur Shapira

Dr. Rogge, it is not too late for the IOC to remember these murdered Olympians as Olympians at the London Olympic Games this Sunday – it is not too late to be on the right side of history.

Sincerely,



Irwin Cotler, P.C., O.C., M.P.
Former Minister of Justice & Attorney General of Canada
Professor of Law (Emeritus), McGill University