

23 February 2021

Dear Real Madrid Ethical Committee,

[MENA Rights Group](#), a Geneva-based legal advocacy NGO that focuses on the protection and promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms in the Middle East and North Africa, and [ALQST for Human Rights](#), a UK-based human rights NGO that defends and promotes human rights in Saudi Arabia, are writing to you regarding [reports](#) that your club are in talks with Saudi Arabia's state-owned Qiddiya project about a 10-year €150 million partnership deal.

We are concerned that this proposed deal reflects the Saudi authorities' PR strategy to invest in sporting ventures in a bid to revamp a tarnished image, known as "sportswashing", and ask you to fully consider the dire human rights situation in Saudi Arabia before making any such partnership.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is ruled by a repressive and autocratic regime that tolerates no criticism or dissent. Since the self-styled "reformist" Mohammed bin Salman came to power in 2017, the country has witnessed an intensified crackdown on civic freedoms and peaceful dissent, including the detention and brutal torture of women human rights defenders, the ongoing detention and unfair trials for a vast number of prisoners of conscience, and the gruesome state-sanctioned murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Human rights defenders and activists are not able to freely carry out their work, nor is anyone able to freely engage in public debate or protest, without facing reprisals.

In a bid to whitewash the kingdom's image and gloss over its appalling human rights record, the Saudi authorities have been pursuing a public relations offensive, including through investing in sport and staging high-profile international sports events. By establishing this partnership, Real Madrid, and Spanish football at large, risk being complicit in glossing over these violations, and providing legitimacy to Saudi Arabia's brutal leaders. As you know, Qiddiya's Board of Directors is [chaired](#) by crown prince Mohammed bin Salman.

This need not be the case. Last year, the kingdom *failed* in a bid to purchase Newcastle United Football Club in the English Premier League, after a long-drawn-out saga. The proposed deal also reflected an attempt by the Saudi authorities to sportswash an abysmal record. Its failure was widely welcomed by Saudi human rights activists and supporters of human rights globally.

Real Madrid likewise has an opportunity to send a powerful message that profit cannot trump values. As such, we urge you to closely examine Saudi Arabia's brutal human rights record, to reflect upon the strong values and ethics of your own football club, and to make an informed decision that best reflects these values.

Please see our websites or more detailed background information on the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia, and do not hesitate to contact if you have any questions.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Inès Osman, Co-founder and Director, MENA Rights Group
Alaa Al-Siddiq, Executive Director, ALQST for Human Rights