



ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
SENATOR JEFF MERKLEY, CHAIRMAN
REPRESENTATIVE JAMES P. MCGOVERN, COCHAIRMAN

December 16, 2021

Jeff Shell
Chief Executive Officer
NBCUniversal
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10112

Dear Mr. Shell:

In June 2013, the Russian government announced the unanimous passage of the discriminatory anti-LGBTQ propaganda law. Despite calls from human rights activists and organizations around the globe, Russia remained the host of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi and NBCUniversal remained the exclusive U.S. broadcaster for the Games. After being made aware of the violence, harassment and discrimination facing LGBTQ Russians and the potential for Russia to launder its image on the backs of the Games, your affiliates promised to report fairly about the discriminatory law and its effect on Russian society and to not “shy away from” coverage of the issue.

NBCUniversal faced a similar situation in 2008 as Beijing was set to host the Summer Olympic Games despite the People’s Republic of China’s abysmal human rights record. With leverage from your organization and others, Chinese authorities pledged to support media freedom for journalists and maintain a commitment to address their human rights issues. More than a decade later, China has not only failed to properly address its human rights issues, but organizations around the world have published evidence of an ongoing genocide campaign against the Uyghur population, the erosion of democracy in Hong Kong, and the removal of foreign journalists and vanishing of press freedom.

Today we write to you regarding your role as an official broadcaster of these Winter Olympic Games and the responsibility of your organization to address these fundamental issues of human rights. In January 2021, the Trump Administration declared that the Chinese government was actively committing genocide in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and in March 2021, the Biden Administration concurred by issuing a similar declaration that China’s treatment of Uyghurs does indeed constitute a genocide. In line with those formal declarations, the U.S. government has taken the step to issue a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. The governments of Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Japan are among the countries that have also pledged to a diplomatic boycott of the Games.

The Congressional-Executive Commission on China has documented the mass internment, forced labor, violence, and decimation of civil and political rights of Uyghur people, ethnic minority populations and citizens in China. In the lead up to major events like the Olympic Games, Chinese authorities have cracked down on civil society, religious groups, and minority populations despite the government's public promises to address its poor human rights record.

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which has been endorsed by a majority of Olympics sponsors, generates a responsibility for companies to address the impact of human rights directly linked to their operations, services, or products. The nearly one billion dollars that NBCUniversal and its affiliates have invested in these Games means the organization bears the responsibility in addressing the impact of China's human rights abuses. Athletes, support staff, and members of the media will be present in a country where an active genocide is taking place, and in adhering with the charter of the Games to foster "respect for universal and fundamental ethical principles," NBCUniversal must think about what that means for those participating in Beijing and Chinese citizens alike.

In light of this, we urge NBCUniversal and its affiliates to do the following:

1. Publicly commit to providing background coverage on the Chinese government's actions in the Uyghur Xinjiang Autonomous Region as well as the suppression of democracy in Hong Kong. We ask that your broadcasts speak to the legislation that the U.S. government and other parliamentary administrations have passed to address the democracy movement in Hong Kong and the crimes against humanity in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.
2. Press Chinese authorities to publicly affirm media and religious freedom during the coverage of the Games. As a broadcast entity, your organization should be particularly concerned with the ongoing curtailing of media freedom and widespread censorship imposed by the Chinese government.
3. Refrain from broadcasting Uyghur or other ethnic minority people in their traditional dress or broadcasting any Chinese state-sponsored footage of the XUAR. The Chinese government and its propaganda arms use the stereotypical display of "happy minorities" to cover up for the crimes committed in the Region. Any broadcast of these types of images lends legitimacy to the Chinese government's version of events which goes against the primary evidence from governments, researchers, and journalists from around the world that prove otherwise.

We firmly support Team USA and its athletes to wholeheartedly participate in these upcoming Games, but we encourage your organization to not juxtapose our athletes' stories with whitewashed Chinese government accounts that cover up the ongoing crimes against humanity. As NBCUniversal is the U.S. broadcaster of these Olympic Games, we urge your organization to not legitimize the Chinese government's attempts to use the Olympics, once again, to sportswash the poor treatment of ethnic minorities, civil society activists, and political dissidents in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Tibet and abroad.

We welcome the opportunity to further discuss how the Commission can assist NBCUniversal with adhering to ethical standards and ensuring a safe environment for athletes, journalists, and other spectators.

We look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for your prompt attention and consideration of these matters.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Jeffrey A. Merkley in blue ink.

Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley
Chairman

Handwritten signature of James P. McGovern in blue ink.

Representative James P. McGovern
Co-Chairman