

## **Sport and politics and injustice**

*Ben Freeth, Justice for Agriculture (JAG) Open Letter Forum No. 20*  
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With the World Cup Cricket taking place very soon, the debate being played out in the media and in all our minds is "Should the world's cricketers play in Zimbabwe or not?"

The question centres around whether sport and Politics are separate or intrinsically linked. In an ideal world sport is about sportsmanship and it is a very healthy pastime in any society. Whether we like it or not though sport has been hijacked by politics and the two go hand in hand. Hitler in the 1936 Olympics was very quick to use sport for his nationalist agenda. He stood in the Olympic arena and made huge political capital for the Nazi Regime out of those Berlin Olympics. The communists used sport in a political manner to exactly the same ends. Huge resources were put towards sport in the communist world culminating in the Moscow Olympics where many countries decided that they would Boycott in 1980, after the invasion of Afghanistan.

In more recent years, during the apartheid regime in South Africa, sport and politics were one and the same thing in the quest by the world to destroy the apartheid regime. Any sportsman that dared to play sport in South Africa was banned from playing sport anywhere else in the world subsequently. A whole generation of South African sportsmen were confined to playing sport in their own country and black-listed from playing sport elsewhere.

The debate to-day is should the cricketers in the 6 matches that are taking place in this current world cup next month come to Zimbabwe and play in the world cup or should they boycott or should they put pressure on the ICC to remove those matches from Zimbabwe and have them in South Africa instead?

It is very clear that in the Zimbabwean situation politics and sport are linked. The President of Zimbabwe is the Patron of The Zimbabwe Cricket Union. The cricket is undoubtedly being used as a showpiece to take the eyes of the world off the terror that is currently reigning in Zimbabwe.

The Zimbabwean regime is responsible for draconian laws far worse than apartheid South Africa. It is responsible for severe Human Rights abuses. It is responsible for the death of 20,000 people in Matebeleland and it is responsible fully for the deliberate and malicious starvation of six to eight million people. For the world to endorse the ICC's decision to come to come to Zimbabwe is to endorse the policies that the Patron of Zimbabwean cricket is responsible for. The world has not recognized the March 2002 Presidential elections and the president of Zimbabwe is, in consequence an illegitimate President. For the cricketers to come to Zimbabwe would be to legitimise the illegitimate. In the words of the anti-apartheid campaigners, who included politicians like Peter Hain "You cannot have normal sport in an abnormal society".

The players and the public alike who are coming to watch the match seem to be intent only on looking after the safety of those players and the public coming to Zimbabwe to watch the matches.

The safety of course has to be guaranteed by the law enforcement agencies in Zimbabwe. It is the law enforcement agencies that have been responsible for the massive deprivation of Human Rights in Zimbabwe; the resultant starvation; the loss of property rights; and the lack of the freedom of the Press, the freedom of speech, the freedom of association, the freedom to earn a living and the freedom to have a home.

President Mugabe is quoted as having said that he wanted cricket to be the way Zimbabweans functioned in the future, because it's a game about Gentlemen - about gentlemen and fair play'. That was more than 20 years ago. In Zimbabwe to-day 'gentlemanly' behaviour is not something that is enjoyed. The total breakdown of the Rule of Law is about the total breakdown of 'gentlemanly' behaviour. The principal is a very simple one - like it or not it's about justice. For the cricketers and their mealie-mouthed organisations and Nation states to come to Zimbabwe, they are evidently supporting double standards and the continuation of injustice. Where South Africa was concerned they were not prepared to play but where Zimbabwe is concerned with its huge excesses of ungentlemanly behaviour, they are prepared to play. That is simply NOT CRICKET.

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