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Public letter to the International Olympic Committee

- Dr Thomas Bach, President of the IOC –

Dear Dr Thomas Bach

This letter can only be fully understood if you also refer to the Internet sources listed, since they provide additional context and evidence to the case made in this letter.

You will agree with us when we say that the equestrian disciplines are the only Olympic sport in which man is competing for medals and recognition with the help of an animal which has to provide for him with excellent endeavour for this purpose. This is highlighted by the fact that, for the purpose of doping controls, it is not man as in other sports, but the animal which is tested, because it is apparently considered that the rider would not sufficiently benefit from performance enhancing drugs. The reward for the horse for this endeavour is, regrettably however, frequently the slaughter house. It is estimated that 70-80% of the horses which train for sports performance are worn out within about 8 years.

Over the recent years, there have been several calls for rule changes, including calls to ban competitive horse riding. However, these have had little impact on the equestrian sport associations.

http://academialibertideutschland.blogspot.de/2009_01_01_archive.html

<http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/against-equestrian-sport.html>

The reasons for this are likely to be found in the structures of successful national equestrian organizations in the FEI, which continue to be firmly rooted in their history.

Behind this are also the significant financial interests of breeders and owners who see the horse as livestock, similar to chicken or pigs on their farms. The latter are fortunately not needed in the Olympics.

The expensive horses, which are also herd animals, are not tortured by factory farming, but frequently through being kept in isolation, since they could be infected or hurt in the herd.

On their way to achieving top performance levels, horses are drilled with quasi sadistic

means, which are usually played down, denied, repressed or consciously accepted by the successful riders, trainers and owners.

The abuse of the horse via „Rollkur“, through which the chin of the horse is pulled to the chest and its back is strained, has been convincingly pointed out by Prof. Heinz Meyer and Dr. Gerd Heuschmann in the video "Voices of the horses." This demonstrates that scientifically sound anatomical knowledge is not being respected and serious injuries occur mainly in the lumbar region of the horse. Dr. Heuschmann puts an end to the widespread view that the large back muscles (because you're sitting on it) readily carry the rider. These muscles tighten when they are converted from freely moving muscle to pre-dominantly statically contracting. The horse is, after all, no more born to carry riders, than the cow, dogs or other pets. It carries itself best as it grazes, stretched down, its head forward. A horse which is on the bit and in a collected state is in an unnatural state, which is required only in dressage. It prevents a relaxed movement of the horse, because it restricts the natural swinging movements of the head, with which the horse normally maintains its balance.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzwOEhZzUn4>

The protest by top class riders, who were highlighted as negative examples in the video and, although made unrecognizable in the video, were identifiable by their horses, could not prevent Gerd Heuschmann now being in demand world-wide as a speaker. Dressage, a discipline which believed it had a monopoly on the health of the horse, has suddenly become the focus of criticism. Individual leading riders, amazingly, in the demanding discipline of eventing, show sympathy for Heuschmann & Co, but probably fear reprisals, should they demonstrate open solidarity.

It is a problem that top class riders, generally, are role models for many riders and children in the leisure and youth development contexts.

Gerd Heuschmann hopes and wishes for a return to the good virtues of the old masters of dressage. It would appear that, at this moment in time, this can only be wishful thinking.

It is not only the motivation for profit but also the framework of rules and regulations, which stand in the way of achieving much needed change.

The tournament horses must be ridden all with bit/kandarre, which can produce heavy traumatisations in the muzzle. Pictures of horses that go against the bit can be observed abundantly in tournaments at all levels. *The illusion is maintained that a "good" rider can guide the horse with a soft hand and without pain.* So-called „Fine aids“ are in reality often the gateway for abuse, because if this ‘gentle’ help does not work, it is ‘rough help’ which is used, especially under the pressure of competition. The resultant pain cannot be measured, but it can only be indirectly diagnosed via the reaction of the horse. The horse learns through negative reinforcement (pain), even though the horse, which is a fearful prey animal, would learn better through positive reinforcement (praise), and in addition would develop trust in humans.

The paradox is, however, that Remonte horses (training in early development 2/3/4/ years, viennese yard riding school 7 years!) are to be initially ridden without a bit, but are then

prescribed the bit and a tight rein for more advanced tasks. The actual skill of the rider is not rated at the Olympics. It is only the successful performance of the horse in spectacular dressage and jumping exercises, which is judged. It is achieved under conditions of extreme stress, and made possible only through the pain of the horse.

The investigations of Dr. Cook, Dr. Strasser and Dr. Heuschmann are clear and at any time examinable by modern scientific research.

Why are they being denied or trivialized, rather than used to engage constructively in the debate?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0a-aV0Rsxmg>

<http://www.bitlessbridle.com/Article-8.pdf>

Horses ridden bitless, even without reins as well as without damaging hoofshoes, proved meanwhile that high standards in dressage, distance and jumping are possible not least because the artificially produced flow of saliva through the bit affects breathing and can produce stomach problems for the horses. In human terms, for 100m - sprinters it has been known for some time that the ability to relax is an important criterion for the quality of movement and speed.

Riding horses bitless is, however, forbidden by the tournament rules of the Equestrian Federation (with one strange exception: Showjumping in the novice category).

Insurers for horses have accepted that the risk of accidents is lower, when horses are ridden without a bit and are happy to provide for this in their policies.

However, there is a widespread irrational fear that loss of control of a horse without a bit is more likely.

A horse takes flight when in fear of death, with or without bit. Every rider knows this!

That's why most riders who use the bit ride almost exclusively in indoor and outdoor schools or arenas ...because they feel safer there.

Experience has shown that the horse, which is a prey animal, responds more calmly to threatening events when it can do so without experiencing pain.

The Olympic movement has evolved since Coubertin and has in its very nature also started to embrace its commercial nature. Turnover in connection with horse-related business is estimated at around €4 billion a year in Germany alone. Admittedly this also creates jobs. But this circumstance alone cannot be an argument for the continuation of this abuse.

In the history of the horse, and how it has been treated by man, the pendulum has repeatedly swung back and forth, between respectful treatment (see Xenophon) and torture-like abuse.

Competitive riding today is unfortunately marred by increased abuse, although the horse no longer has to obey the rider to the death.

That was in the time when the cavalry was instrumental in war (until the First World War). After that horse riding was free to develop independently from the military. In Germany the Nazis prevented critical reflection of the total obedience principle. As an equestrian nation, Germany continues to be both successful and influential. Therefore initiatives from Germany are important in this sport.

A similar development took place in the sport of fencing, because of the invention of gunpowder. This allowed fencing to develop free of military necessity and the associated struggle for life and death. In the modern sport of fencing the rules and the material for the protection of people have changed with technological advances (Kevlar suits, flexible blades, etc.). In boxing, head gear has been introduced to protect the fighters.

Why not protect the horse from injury and pain in the same way?

Changes in horse riding equipment, as well as rules and regulations, continue to be minimal compared with the times when it was still a matter of life and death.

A modern movement of horse riding that is founded on the application of modern anatomical knowledge, and which rejects the subjugation of the horse, continues to be excluded from participating in the Olympic process by the current regulations.

Why should a horse that is for example, only ridden with a neck strap not be allowed to participate? Clearly, this does not constitute an advantage to the rider, who manages to achieve the same performance with fewer aids, purely by riding the horse skilfully.

In principle, all types of softer bridles should be allowed as long as it is ensured that the rider really has the horse "under control". Potential instruments of torture such as bit/kandarré spurs, riding crop, among other things need to be reviewed and abuse in training as in competition, should be punished as doping. The age limits of horses should generally be raised in Materialprüfung (FN Germany), and the word „Material“ itself should be abolished.

Since we believe that a change under the present leadership of the International Equestrian Federation, and its national associations, will not happen because of the previously mentioned structures and traditions, an external impetus is required to change the consciousness and the mindset of equestrian associations, and spectators, to bring about these changes and a more humane equestrian sport.

We hope that your depth of knowledge in the sport of fencing is useful to you, when assessing the situation in equestrian sport. You can, even if you are not a horse rider, see in the flesh and on the Internet, that horses continue to be abused in competition and training.

Cosmetic changes in the rules and in the training guidelines, to which the representatives of the FN continue to refer, have hardly made a difference.

<http://www.pro-equo-bw.com/berichte/pferdesport-und-tierschutz/>

**An appeal to it, Mr. Thomas Bach and the members of the olympic committee:
Please they use themselves for the art in the riding, by ensuring that this**

riding is ruled out so long from the program of the Olympic Games, until by the change of the rules and their conversion to the practice is ensured that the abuse of the horses can be excluded effectively, compatible with the olympic idea. Fairness also opposite animals!!

In the Press we read that you advance your planned Olympic reforms with great assurance. In your meeting with the Pope you said that it was important to "emphasize our values and to make it clear that we are a value-oriented and value-based organization". The abuse of horses in sport is from our knowledge physically and psychologically more serious than doping and these are not an isolated cases, but common practice. We know that you Dr. Bach can neither change the rules of equestrian sport, nor the inadequate laws of animal welfare, but you can use your influence to end the cruel subjugation of the horse, at least in Olympic sport.

Yours, in sport

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Supporters:

Judith Walther - Switzerland , Pilar Costa Navajas - Espana, Ute Bräuer - Germany , Prof. Dr. Ingrid Bähr - Hamburg, Francesca Conigliaro - Italy, Dr. Frank Herold - Birmingham, Simone Hopp - Bad Homburg, Janina Budenz - Karben, Ann -Kathrin Schöppner - Grebenhain , Anja Meckel - Wiesbaden, Melanie Unger - Frankfurt / Main, Anita Priemer – Rosbach, Friederike Horas – Frankfurt/Main, Dr. Bernd Holstiege -Frankfurt/Main

- and other sports educators and riders

Appendix:

Sayings of Old and Young Masters:

„Your horse should be your trusted friend, not your slave! „(Xenophon)

„The horse does not have any obligation to understand humans and it serve. Nevertheless the horse is ready to carry humans and draw its loads. That is a large victim, for whom humans must be grateful. At the best one and most beautiful one is the horse under his sort. It is great, if humans understand this and loves the horse in such a way like it to be is: Freely."

(Frans Toivola)

„The anatomy and the psyche of the horse give its training way. “

(Gerd Heuschmann)

Hoof fitting as absolute pain circuit breakers is purest doping

(Hiltrud Straßer)

„Lissomeness and releasingness are the preconditions for the volunteers presented obedience, not for the painful submission of the horse.”

(Guérinière)

„For what the horse does under compulsion, as Simon also observes, is done without understanding; and there is no beauty in it either, any more than if one should whip and spur a dancer”

(Xenophon)