

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 17, 2022

Mr. Adam Silver  
Commissioner  
National Basketball Association  
645 5th Avenue  
New York, NY 10022

Dear Commissioner Silver:

We write to express our deep concerns regarding the National Basketball Association's (NBA) relationship with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Over the years, the NBA has continued to overlook the egregious human rights abuses committed by the CCP, allowing the CCP politics to play a significant role in the NBA's business decisions. The most recent example of which was exemplified with the abrupt end of Enes Kanter Freedom's NBA career.

Throughout his decade-long career, Enes Kanter Freedom has utilized his platform in the NBA to draw attention to global human rights abuses. At first, Kanter Freedom chose to speak out against the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his regime's dismantling of human rights and democratic protections, which included direct attacks against Kantor Freedom's own family. However, once his criticisms turned toward the Chinese Communist Party late last year, free speech was no longer a right that the NBA valued or protected.

The Chinese Communist Party has a long-standing history of human rights abuses against ethnic and religious minorities. Since April 2017, the CCP has forcefully detained over one million Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Hui, and members of other Muslim groups in internment camps in the Xinjiang province. These individuals have been subject to physical and psychological abuses, including forced sterilization, sexual abuse, rape, and forced labor.

Despite global concern and outcry of the crimes committed in Xinjiang, little has been done by global businesses to hold China accountable because profit margins are at stake. The NBA is among the worst – refusing to stand up to blatant human rights abuses. Many of the NBA's primary sponsors, including Nike, Adidas, and Microsoft, have products produced by forced Uyghur labor. We believe these business relationships with CCP cannot be overlooked when examining the NBA's actions, including the status of Enes Kanter Freedom's employment.

In addition to wanting to maintain corporate sponsorships, the NBA greatly benefits from game broadcasts in China. As you are well aware, the NBA lost about \$400 million in revenue during the 2019-2020 season stemming from former Houston Rocket General Manager Daryl Morey's tweet in support of Hong Kong protestors. Similarly, following Kanter Freedom's first demonstration against the CCP in support of Tibet, China banned streaming of Celtics games for the duration of the year – another significant blow to the NBA's revenues.

On the flip side, the NBA has Chamath Palihapitiya, partial owner of a predominant franchise, spewing despicable comments about the Uyghurs. Palihapitiya recently said, "Nobody cares

about what's happening to the Uyghurs, okay... I'm just telling you a very hard, ugly truth. Of all the things I care about, yes, it's below my line." This is yet another glaring example of the NBA community's disregard for the Uyghur people and kowtowing to the CCP. Both Palihapitiya's reprehensible comments, and the NBA's lack of a forceful response, was appalling.

It is clear that the NBA cherry picks which social and political demonstrations they will support. A quick four months after speaking out against the Chinese Communist Party, Enes Kanter Freedom was dropped from his team. The NBA clearly feared that Kanter Freedom's activism would lead to a repeat of the political and monetary repercussions that they suffered after Daryl Morey's tweet in defense of freedom for Hong Kong.

Rather than standing up to the CCP for its continued human rights abuses and profiting off forced labor, the NBA continues to cower to the CCP, allowing the political preferences of a malevolent regime to intervene in NBA business decisions and silence its employees and players.

It is possible for leaders in the global sports community to take a stance against China. In fact, Steve Simon of the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) received broad international support for his decision to suspend all WTA tournaments in China. Therefore, Commissioner Silver, please consider how the NBA plans to stand up to the CCP for its ongoing human rights abuses, including genocide, and educate players, employees, and franchises of the CCP's oppression. We also ask you to inform us on how you intend to protect the rights of courageous players who choose to speak out against the CCP in the future, despite your failure to do so in the case of Enes Kanter Freedom.

Sincerely,



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Michael Waltz  
Member of Congress



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Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator



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Rick Scott  
U.S. Senator



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Joni Ernst  
U.S. Senator



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Dr. Neal P. Dunn  
Member of Congress



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Mario Diaz-Balart  
Member of Congress



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Vicky Hartzler  
Member of Congress



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Scott Franklin  
Member of Congress



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Young Kim  
Member of Congress



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Jeff Duncan  
Member of Congress