

Rejecting 'Israeli' Athletes: A Real Test of Indonesia's Firm Stance?

News:

Indonesia: The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) rejected 'Israel' Gymnastics Federation's (IGF) appeals to allow its athletes to compete in the Artistic Gymnastics World Championships in Jakarta, Indonesia, from October 19–25, 2025. The Indonesian government denied visas to six 'Israeli' gymnasts, citing support for Palestine and domestic pressure. IGF appealed to CAS and the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG), requesting measures to ensure participation or cancel the event. CAS dismissed both appeals, and FIG stated it has no authority over visa decisions. Indonesia reaffirmed its stance, aligning with its foreign policy and public sentiment. (Source: en.antaranews.com)

Comment:

Indonesia's decision to reject the participation of 'Israeli' athletes in the World Gymnastics Championship is a commendable and principled move. It reflects Indonesia's firm stance toward 'Israel'. This action should be regarded as an initial step for Indonesia to adopt a consistent and decisive position concerning the Jewish entity's presence in the country, not only in sports but also across other areas such as economics, tourism, education, and beyond.

Although Indonesia has consistently expressed strong support for the independence of Palestine and maintains no formal diplomatic relations with the Jewish entity, informal relations continue to exist. In recent years, several 'Israeli' athletes have competed in Indonesia despite the absence of official diplomatic ties. Among them are Misha Zilberman, a badminton player who participated in the 2015 BWF World Championships in Jakarta; Yuval Shemla, a climber who joined the 2022 IFSC Climbing World Cup in Jakarta; and Mikhail Yakovlev, a track cyclist who won a bronze medal at the 2023 UCI Track Nations Cup. In addition, an Israeli parliamentary delegation attended the 144th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly held in Bali in 2022, although not as official guests of the Indonesian government.

From a trade perspective, despite the absence of formal diplomatic relations, commercial activities between Indonesia and 'Israel' persist through third-party intermediaries such as Singapore and Hong Kong. In 2024, Indonesia's imports from 'Israel' amounted to approximately USD 54.2 million, consisting mainly of mechanical machinery, electrical equipment, optical instruments, and pharmaceutical products. Meanwhile, Indonesia's exports to 'Israel' reached around USD 236 million, with key commodities including leather footwear, palm oil, and textile products. Similarly, in the tourism sector, thousands of 'Israeli' citizens have been allowed to visit Indonesia, while many Indonesians also travel to the Jewish entity.

These data indicate that Indonesia's stance toward Israel has not been entirely firm. Therefore, the recent rejection of 'Israeli' gymnasts should ideally mark the beginning of a consistent and comprehensive policy against 'Israel' in all sectors. However, if this rejection is not followed by broader consistency, it raises an important question: was the decision truly motivated by solidarity with Palestine, or merely a response to public pressure opposing Israel's presence in Indonesia?

It would be unfortunate if public pressure were the sole reason. Such a case would suggest that the Indonesian government's position on Palestine lacks sincerity and that Indonesia is no different from other countries that rhetorically support Palestine while maintaining practical relations with the Jewish entity.

This situation should serve as a reflection for the Indonesian public—to continue urging the government to act consistently in both words and deeds. Moreover, it should be a lesson for the broader Muslim community that as long as governments in the Muslim world remain confined by nationalistic interests, humanitarian and Islamic concerns will continue to be sidelined. Therefore, Muslims must not limit their struggle to short-term issues but strive for the establishment of Islamic governance genuinely committed to the interests of the global Muslim Ummah.

Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
Abdullah Aswar