

January 20, 1980

**Letter by President Jimmy Carter to the President of
the United States Olympic Committee Robert Kane**

Citation:

"Letter by President Jimmy Carter to the President of the United States Olympic Committee Robert Kane", January 20, 1980, Wilson Center Digital Archive, FRUS, 1977-1980, Vol. 6 Soviet Union
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/134719>

Summary:

Jimmy Carter explains his call for a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

As President of this nation and as honorary President of the United States Olympic Committee, I write to advise you of my views concerning the Games of the XXII Olympiad scheduled to be held in Moscow this summer.

I regard the Soviet invasion and the attempted suppression of Afghanistan as a serious violation of international law and an extremely serious threat to world peace. This invasion also endangers neighboring independent countries and access to a major part of the world's oil supplies. It therefore threatens our own national security, as well as the security of the region and the entire world.

We must make clear to the Soviet Union that it cannot trample upon an independent nation and at the same time do business as usual with the rest of the world. We must make clear that they will pay a heavy economic and political cost for such aggressions. That is why I have taken the severe economic measures announced on January 4,² and why other free nations are supporting these measures. That is why the United Nations General Assembly,³ by an overwhelming vote of 103 to 18, condemned the invasion and urged the prompt withdrawal of Soviet troops.

I want to reaffirm my own personal commitment to the principles and purposes of the Olympic Movement. I believe in the desirability of keeping government policy out of the Olympics, but deeper issues are at stake.

In the Soviet Union international sports competition is itself an aspect of Soviet Government policy, as is the decision to invade Afghanistan. The head of the Moscow Olympic Organizing Committee is a high Soviet Government official.

The Soviet Government attaches enormous political importance to the holding of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, and if the Olympics are not held in Moscow because of Soviet military aggression in Afghanistan, this powerful signal of world outrage cannot be hidden from the Soviet people, and will reverberate around the globe. Perhaps it will deter future aggression.

I therefore urge the USOC, in cooperation with other National Olympic Committees, to advise the International Olympic Committee that if Soviet troops do not fully withdraw from Afghanistan within the next month, Moscow will become an unsuitable site for a festival meant to celebrate peace and good will. Should the Soviet Union fail to withdraw its troops within the time prescribed above, I urge the USOC to propose that the Games either be transferred to another site such as Montreal or to multiple sites, or be cancelled for this year. If the International Olympic Committee rejects such a USOC proposal, I urge the USOC and the Olympic Committees of other like-minded nations not [\[Page 745\]](#)to participate in the Moscow Games. In this event, if suitable arrangements can be made, I urge that such nations conduct alternative games of their own this summer at some other appropriate site or sites. The United States Government is prepared to lend its full support to any and all such efforts.

I know from your letter to me and your meeting with Secretary Vance and Lloyd Cutler of your deep concern for the men and women throughout the world who have trained tirelessly in the hopes of participating in the 1980 Olympic Games. I share your concern. I would support the participation of athletes from the entire world at Summer Olympic Games or other Games this summer outside the Soviet Union, just as I welcome athletes from the entire world to Lake Placid for the Winter Olympic Games.

I have the deepest admiration and respect for Olympic athletes and their pursuit of excellence. No one understands better than they the meaning of sacrifice to achieve worthy goals. There is no goal of greater importance than the goal at stake here—the security of our nation and the peace of the world.

I also urge that the IOC take a further step to eliminate future political competition among nations to serve as hosts for the Olympic Games. I call upon all nations to join in supporting a permanent site for the Summer Olympics in Greece, and to seek an appropriate permanent site for the Winter Olympics.

The course I am urging is necessary to help secure the peace of the world at this critical time. The most important task of world leaders, public and private, is to deter aggression and prevent war. Aggression destroys the international amity and good will that the Olympic Movement attempts to foster. If our response to aggression is to continue with international sports as usual in the capital of the aggressor, our other

steps to deter aggression are undermined.

The spirit and the very future of the Games depends upon courageous and resolute action at this time. I call for your support and your help in rallying the support of the other Olympic Committees throughout the world.

Jimmy Carter.