



July 9, 2021

H.E. Yoshihide Suga
Prime Minister of Japan
1-6-1 Nagata-cho
Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100 – 8968
Japan

Mr. Thomas Bach, President
International Olympic Committee
Château de Vidy
Case postale 356
1001 Lausanne
Switzerland

Dear Prime Minister Suga and President Bach:

As representatives of nurses and other health care workers on every continent around the world, we urge you to cancel or postpone the Tokyo Olympics to protect the health and safety of the residents of Japan, the thousands of athletes and support personnel from the participating nations, and the residents of their home countries upon their return home.

While we recognize that some important measures have been enacted to reduce the threat of contagion of Covid-19, in the view of medical professionals in Japan and across the globe, the continuing spread of the pandemic, especially with the emergence of dangerous, more transmissible variants of concern, and the low level of vaccination in many countries, the risks to public health remain far too great for the Games to proceed.

As of July 5, the World Health Organization (WHO) has documented 183,368,584 confirmed cases of Covid-19 and 3,975,503 deaths, the worst global pandemic in a century. While advances in reducing the infection rate due to rates of vaccination have been made in some more developed nations, most of the world's population remains unvaccinated, and this is extremely dangerous as the virus continues to spread. Even in many of those countries with higher vaccination rates, elected leaders have been forced to reimpose substantial major safety infection control measures due to rapid rise in new surges of the pandemic.¹

¹ <https://covid19.who.int/>

Vaccination rates show a wide variance by continent and country, with low income global south nations disproportionately lacking in access to vaccinations and rates of vaccination. As of July 5, only 3.8 percent of Africans have been vaccinated, compared to 74 percent of North Americans and 70 percent of Europeans. To date, 85 percent of all shots have been administered in high and upper middle-income countries compared to only 0.3 percent to residents of low-income nations. The inevitable result will be that if the Games do proceed, the danger of exacerbating the number of deaths, hospitalizations, and infections, especially in lower income countries from personnel returning from the Games is extremely high, further exacerbating the already extreme disparity between wealthier and lower income nations.²

Further, the rise of the Delta variant, now reported to have spread to at least 95 countries, as well as the even more dangerous Delta-plus variant, increases the global threat. Various studies have determined the Delta variant to be more transmissible, and according to one scientific study roughly doubles the risk of hospitalization compared to the prior more commonly spreading Alpha variant.³

Covid conditions in Tokyo and the rest of Japan also demonstrate the serious risk to participants, to their home countries upon their return, and to the Japanese population, especially so since the percentage of Japanese people fully vaccinated is only 14 percent. As the Tokyo Metropolitan Government website warned July 2: “The rate of increase of new positive cases has been rising considerably for three weeks straight, and it is thought that a resurgence in infections is occurring. Taking into consideration the increase in the movement of people and the effects of variants, a rapid resurgence in infections is feared. There is the risk that health care systems will be strained due to an increase in new positive cases.”⁴

Medical professionals in Japan have been in the forefront of calling for postponement of the Games. The Japan Federation of Medical Workers has warned of a severe impact on the Japanese health care system bordering on “medical collapse” and called on the government of Japan to “cancel or reschedule the Tokyo Olympics.” In a public statement June 10, the union emphasized the public danger noting, “if the government prioritizes holding the Olympics over protecting the lives of the people, there is a strong fear that it will cause another spread of infection... We strongly protest the government's position to host the Olympics in the midst of the pandemic, and strongly urge the government to decide not to extend the risk of infection further,” the union concluded.

In addition, the Tokyo Medical Practitioners Association representing 6000 primary care doctors has called for the games to be called off, noting in mid-May that hospitals have already been overwhelmed, “have their hands full and have almost no spare capacity” amid a surge in infections.⁵

Japanese nurses and other health care workers have also raised the critical concern that frontline caregivers should “not be pulled away from hospitals and other patient care settings, where they are desperately needed right now with Covid surging across Japan.”

Public opinion polls in Japan have repeatedly shown widespread opposition to holding the Olympics during the pandemic as well. A mid-May survey by the Asahi newspaper found that 83% of people wanted the event to be

² <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-vaccinations-tracker.html>

³ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)01358-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)01358-1/fulltext) Preliminary data from the United Kingdom and Israel indicate that Covid vaccines have decreased effectiveness in preventing infections with the Delta variant. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/investigation-of-novel-sars-cov-2-variant-variant-of-concern-20201201> and <https://www.ft.com/content/0b3da41e-6390-4f4b-866c-da5c6aec7f5e>.

⁴ <https://stopcovid19.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/en>

⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/tokyo-doctors-call-cancellation-olympic-games-due-covid-19-2021-05-18/>

anceled or postponed.⁶

Canceling the Games is also called for given that the International Olympic Committee’s Playbook for Athletes and Officials does not fully address ventilation and air flow and filtration in shared areas such as dormitories and eating areas or in areas for competition.⁷ The science is clear—Covid-19 is transmitted through aerosols that can stay suspended in and travel through the air.

In conclusion, we strongly urge you to cancel or postpone the 2021 Tokyo Olympics due to the dire threat to public health and safety posed by the continued spread of the global pandemic and the risk it poses to participants in the Games, their coaches and support staff, their home countries upon their return, and to the tens of millions of residents of the host country Japan. Holding the Games at this moment in the global pandemic would run counter to the goal of the Olympic Movement to “building a peaceful and better world.”

If you have questions regarding this letter or would like to arrange a meeting, please contact Kenneth Zinn, coordinator of Global Nurses United, at +1-202-297-4976 or at kzinn@nationalnursesunited.org. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Annie Butler, Federal Secretary
Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation
AUSTRALIA

Shirley Marshal Díaz Morales, Presidente
Federação Nacional dos Enfermeiros
BRAZIL

Linda Silas, President
Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions
CANADA

Nancy Bédard, Présidente
Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec
CANADA

Rodrigo Manuel López García, Secretario General
Asociación Nacional de Profesionales en Enfermería
COSTA RICA

Julio César García Cruceta, Secretario General
Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Enfermería
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

⁶ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/japanese-business-leaders-add-to-chorus-against-holding-olympics-11621855864#:~:text=The%20Japanese%20are%20skeptical.,up%20from%2069%25%20in%20April.>

⁷ [https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Documents/Olympic-Games/Tokyo-2020/Playbooks/The-Playbook-Athletes-and-Officials-V3.pdf#_ga=2.264738059.581864330.1625353594-1725148877.1625353594\)](https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Documents/Olympic-Games/Tokyo-2020/Playbooks/The-Playbook-Athletes-and-Officials-V3.pdf#_ga=2.264738059.581864330.1625353594-1725148877.1625353594)

George Tsolas, President
Thomai Aslanogou, General Secretary
Pan-Hellenic Federation of Nursing Staff (PASONOP)
GREECE

Luis Antulio Alpirez Guzman, Secretario General
Sindicato Nacional de los Trabajadores de Salud de Guatemala
GUATEMALA

Josué Jeremías Orellana Muñoz, Presidente
Asociación Nacional de Enfermeras/os Auxiliares de Honduras
HONDURAS

Rince Joseph, President
United Nurses Association
INDIA

Dr. Andrea Bottega, Segretario Nazionale
Nursind
ITALY

Shinobu Morita, President
Japan Federation of Medical Workers' Unions
JAPAN

Shouts Makhumbo Galang'anda Simeza, President
National Organisation of Nurses and Midwives of Malawi
MALAWI

Zoila Bernardita Cotrina Díaz, Presidenta
Federación de Enfermeras del Ministerio de Salud del Perú (FEDEMINSAP)
PERU

Maristela P. Abenojar, RN, MAN, National President
Filipino Nurses United
THE PHILIPPINES

José Carlos Martins, Presidente
Sindicato dos Enfermeiros Portugueses
PORTUGAL

Andre Gitembagara, President
Rwanda Nurses and Midwives Union
RWANDA

Na, Soon Ja, President
Korean Health and Medical Workers Union
SOUTH KOREA

Saman Rathnapriya, President
Government Nursing Officers' Association
SRI LANKA

Yun Shang Lo, President
Taiwan Nurses Union
TAIWAN

Bonnie Castillo, RN, Executive Director
Deborah Burger, RN, President
Zenei Triunfo-Cortez, RN, President
Jean Ross, RN, President
National Nurses United
UNITED STATES

Valeria Quintero, Presidenta
Sindicato Unico de Enfermeria del Uruguay
URUGUAY

cc: Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization
Toshiko Fukui, President, Japanese Nurses Association
Dr. Akio Suda, President, Tokyo Medical Practitioners Association
