

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## AN ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION: THE EXAMPLE OF THE PARTICIPATION OF REFUGEE DELEGATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

In a world of deepening globalization, although peace and development are the themes of the times, the international community is faced with common issues such as climate change, refugee immigration, the North-South gap and international finance problems, which are inseparable from all countries and regions, and the trends towards anti-globalization and cultural nationalism are also on the rise. The International Olympic Committee (IOC), as a major international organization, has chosen to address some of these issues through an approach of international sport participation, upholding the spirit of the Olympic Games and passing it on in the era of globalization. This paper will explore the IOC's commitment to achieving the global goals of peace and truce, solidarity and harmony, the community of all human beings, as well as its own cultural transformation, by introducing refugee delegations to the Olympic Games to send a signal of concern to the world about refugee issues.

## KEYWORDS

Refugee delegations; the Olympic Games; era of globalization; cultural transformation

### 1. CASE STUDY: REFUGEE DELEGATIONS TO THE OLYMPIC GAMES DEPARTING FROM RIO 2016

At the 31st Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 2016, the international sporting arena showed a refugee team of six men and four women to the world for the first time. In Table 1, it can be seen that the refugee athletes participate in a number of competitions of different nationalities and places of residence without restrictions. This was another major breakthrough for the IOC in the global refugee issue, as at the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly's Olympic Truce Resolution, the then President Bach advocated an Olympic special

delegation based on criteria of identified refugee status and their sporting level, thus encouraging the world to become more aware of the severity of refugee crisis and send positive signals and aspirations for survival and development to refugees worldwide through sport, which is a global and common language to communicate. The adoption and implementation of this resolution has had a profound and significant impact on the Olympic Games and refugee issues in the age of globalization, by allowing them to leave behind their complex national identities and not represent their countries or regions, just to carry the Olympic flames in refugee camps, to present themselves at opening, closing ceremonies and in various competitions, to play the Olympic anthem instead of the national anthem and to wave the Olympic flag instead of the national flag.

Table 1: Information About the Refugee Delegation to The Rio 2016 Olympic Games

Nationality	Current Residence/Training Place	Gender	Age	Competition Items
South Sudan	Kenya	M	24	Men's 1500m Track & Field
South Sudan	Kenya	F	21	Women's 1500m Track & Field
South Sudan	Kenya	M	21	Men's 800m Track & Field
South Sudan	Kenya	F	23	Women's 800m Track & Field
South Sudan	Kenya	M	28	Men's 400m Track & Field
Democratic Republic of Congo	Brazil	M	24	Men's 90kg Judo
Democratic Republic of Congo	Brazil	F	28	Women's 70kg Judo
Syria	Germany	F	18	Women's 100m Butterfly
Syria	Belgium	M	25	Men's 100m Freestyle, Butterfly
Ethiopia	Luxembourg	M	36	Men's Marathon

Source: Athlete Details on the Official Website of the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games in Brazil, <https://olympics.com/en/olympic-games/rio-2016/athletes>

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## 2. THE MAIN OBSTACLES TO DEVELOPMENT REVEALED BY THE PARTICIPATION OF REFUGEE DELEGATIONS IN THE OLYMPIC GAMES AND IDEAS FOR SOLVING GLOBALIZATION ISSUES

Since the ancient Olympic Games, it has been a festive celebration of sacred truce in ancient Greece and the spirit of celebrating peace and truce has continued in modern Olympic culture since then, with the Charter principles explicitly calling for the insistence on contributing to a better world and engaging in sporting activities that are conducive to peace and solidarity (John, 2004). Although several Olympic Games between 1914 and 1992 were abandoned by major international or regional wars of the times, the IOC continued to work tirelessly for the world through the medium of global sporting events, including by releasing doves of peace, shuttle diplomacy of leaders and making public apologies. It was not until 1993 that the Olympic Truce was adopted and the following year became the International Year of Sport and the Olympic Ideal, and since then the Truce Resolution has been submitted every year for the relevant situations of the current year.

From the 1990s, the beginning of the era of globalization, continuing high tide of refugees has hit the international community and the Olympic Games in equal measure (Bu et al., 2021). The violence caused by racial discrimination and nationalism, political oppression and economical exploitation caused by different ideologies and religious affiliations have become more and more intensified, all of which are negative global issues that seriously affect and undermine the harmony and justice of the Olympic cultures and values. Regional wars and conflicts, as well as international terrorism, are the most fundamental factors in the outbreak of global refugee crisis, and the key to solving this problem is active truce, rejection of war and promotion of peace, which is the logical necessity that the Olympics always advocates and keeps pace with the times. The IOC has therefore insisted on its principle and intervened to alleviate it through its unique international sports platform. It has been involved in refugee issues since the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, when the OCOG launched a joint refugee donation campaign with the UNHCR and they have since continued to provide assistance, including funding, financing, and facilities, which has been a great inspiration to refugees around the world (Ma, 2017).

## 3. THE CULTURAL VALUES SHOWN BY THE PARTICIPATION OF REFUGEE DELEGATIONS IN THE OLYMPIC GAMES

### 3.1 The Spirit of Refugee Delegations to The Olympic Games

In the current trend of globalization and the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, poverty is still the primary issue to be tackled, and refugees have been discriminated against or ignored by their countries or regions in the international community for long periods, which always affects their survival and individual developments. The participation of refugees in the Olympic Games means that all of them, regardless of their national identity or economic conditions, have the same right to pursue their overall development and complete dignity as individuals, and more opportunities to do sport exercise and to be physically and psychologically fit (Malia, 2014). And it's also a concrete expression of the Olympic spirits, which concern itself with the development and liberation of humanity and the promotion of a peaceful and beautiful world.

Through its international platform and profound influence, the Olympic Games will spread the word about the current situation of refugees all over the world, calling on the global society to be aware of and reflect on the survival of the millions of people behind refugee delegations (Qin, 2008). The Olympic Games are not only a symbol of humanism, but it also demonstrates to the world extraordinary contribution it can make to individuals, society and international community, and conveys the universal ideal of building an international community with peace, justice, equality, liberality, solidarity and harmony.

### 3.2 The New Olympic Connotation of The United Community

In 2021, the IOC added "Together" to the motto "Faster, Higher, Stronger", in response to the complex and serious social situation in current era of globalization and process of modern international development (Zhao, 2016). In addition to the long-standing consensus crises such as terrorism, financial turmoil, hegemony and wave of refugees, the sudden outbreak of global public epidemics have also plunged humanity into intermittent and persistent panic, making it important to emphasize the importance of global united community.

The Olympic Games are not only an international field of competition

between nations and a physical symbol of group honor, but nowadays it's one of the few arenas that can unite all humans of the world, and is also endowed with the significance of an unyielding community of human life. At the same time, it's the function of the Olympic Games to break down national divisions and achieve integration and unity through its cultural value and sporting form that has put forward the new concept of "Together". This is a complement to Olympic spirits and a call for the construction of a united community among all human beings. The participation of refugee delegations in the Olympic Games, the postponement rather than suspension of the Tokyo Olympic Games are some typical and empathetic examples that can demonstrate firm determination of mankind to choose gathering community over unilateralism and nationalism (Li, 2021). The addition of the Olympic spiritual core is also an up-to-date adaptation to sustainable development in the era of globalization, and it makes great efforts to develop human solidarity and harmonious achievement of the international community.

### 3.3 The Global Cultural and Educational Significance of The Olympic Games

The Olympic Games are also rich in cultural and educational connotations, which often influence value judgments and choices of the audiences around the world. The modern Olympic Games continue to uphold the peaceful values and core principles of the ancient Olympic Games, and they have evolved with the times. As a depoliticized international sporting platform, the Olympics allow refugee athletes from different cultural backgrounds and economic levels to participate without being overlooked or discriminated against, and moreover, this act reflects the mutual understanding and construction of solidarity in behaviour, spirit and vision of sports, fully following the principles of the Olympics (He, 2009).

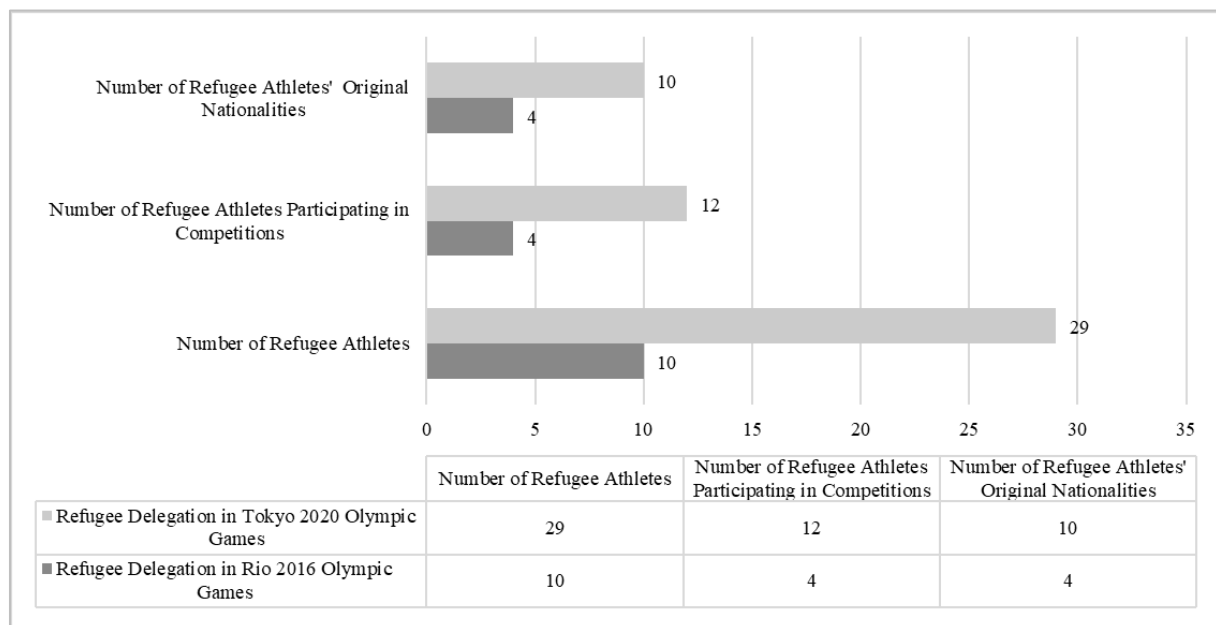
With the appeal of the IOC and the cooperation of participating countries, the Olympics have added the participation of refugee delegations with non-nationalities and non-national identities through sporting medium, gradually avoiding audience's narrow utilitarianism and egoism, forming a common autonomous concept of solidarity and peace for all mankind, reaching the unification of human beings as an organic whole in terms of cognition and behaviour, and thus to promote the interdependence and cooperation of the international community for sustainable development.

## 4. THE CASE OF PARTICIPATION OF REFUGEE DELEGATIONS FOR EXPLORING THE PRACTICES IN INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY PROMOTED BY THE OLYMPIC CULTURE

The IOC has always insisted on strengthening global governance in collaboration with other international organizations. It can be seen that the culture of Olympic Games have always converged with the United Nations on issues such as refugee populations, international terrorism and climate change. The IOC is also an important global platform that helps to construct a harmonious international community and to alleviate global severe problems in its unique way.

Consequently, in the case of refugees, the policies of IOC have supported refugees both spiritually and materially around the world from long-term assistance to the participation of refugee delegations in the Olympic Games, doing their utmost to provide financial and facility assistance to refugees around the world, encouraging them a return to normal and dignified life and organizing all varieties sporting events (Wang and Chen, 2009). Despite the sheer number of refugees and their tough living conditions, which brings severe threaten to undermine own interests of nations, some of their governments start to take a more precautionary and preventative attitude than providing asylum directly, the measures take by Olympics have made more people aware of the seriousness of the refugee problems that afflicts them (Zhang and Mao, 2012). While it will not be possible to care for and change lives of all refugees or to eradicate the strife and conflict condition of those areas, long-term assistance and concerns will save them from destruction and gradually place the pursuit of peaceful and united community at the global level.

In order to widely and continuously spread the Olympic cultural values of equality, solidarity and peace, and to give more refugees the rights to pursue various sporting competitions and liberality of individual development, after having the delegation for the first time at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games has likewise officially approved and increased the refugee delegation. As shown in Figure 1, the number of refugee athletes and their original nationalities, competition items has increased compared to the first 10-person delegation. Although there is no national or ethnic identity, sport is the essential language they share, which demonstrates the spirit of acceptance and equal development of people from all over the world in the Olympic culture, and shows an important platform for the creation of the united human community through barriers of races and religions (Westmattelmannd et al., 2020).



**Figure 1:** Tokyo 2020 vs Rio 2016 Refugee Delegation to the Olympic Games

**Source:** Athlete Details on the Official Website of the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games in Brazil, <https://olympics.com/en/olympic-games/rio-2016/athletes>; Athlete Details on the Official Website of the Tokyo Olympics in Japan, <https://olympics.com/zh/athletes/>

In addition, the IOC has issued a new proposal in the Olympic Agenda 2020+5 in 2021, which should also improve other opportunities for refugees to participate in Olympic events, emphasizing the necessity to enhance physical and spiritual supports for displaced refugees, focusing on cooperation with the UNHCR to address related difficulties. The IOC also need to insist on making full use of its solidarity foundation to give financial assistance to refugees, so that they can have better living and personal security to participate in physical exercises, activities and competitions (Sun, et al., 2021). And the Olympic cultures and spirits can be spread wider and more influential by bringing education for all refugees over the world.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In the context of globalized era and the theme of peace and development, the Olympic Games continue to firmly uphold its principles and tackle the global governance issues by its unique approaches, not only as a global sporting competition platform, but also as a universal language and faith that can be shared and communicated by all human beings across different colour, race and nationality, and has a natural advantage in promoting human development in culture. The Olympic Games always convey and call for the ideals of peace and solidarity in the international community in a passionate, inspiring and contagious way, actively reflecting on and working to resolve the hard plight of refugees around the world, striving to help achieve their rights to get independent development liberally, and fully living up to its spirit and mission of promoting sustainable development goals, making important contributions to participating in global refugee governance and building a harmonious and united international human community.

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