



Mr Dale Vince OBE
Chairman
Forest Green Rovers Football Club
The New Lawn
Another Way
Nailsworth
Gloucestershire
GL6 0FG

25th May, 2022

Dear Mr Vince,

Condemnation of Israel at The New Lawn Stadium

UK Lawyers for Israel is a voluntary association of lawyers which seeks the application of rules and laws to counter boycotts and other actions targeting Israelis.

First of all we congratulate FGRFC on its promotion. We hope the success of the club continues and it prospers in League One.

We write concerning an incident at FGRFC's match against Harrogate on 30 April, 2022. Dr Husam Zomlot, Head of Mission at the Palestinian Mission to the UK attended the match. The advertising boards by the pitch displayed the slogan "End the Invasion and Occupation of Palestine". You spoke to Dr Zomlot on the pitch and both you and Dr Zomlot publicised the event on social media. The Palestine flag was also hoisted over the ground on 18 April, 2022. In reference to that display you posted the following on Twitter:

We flew this flag at FGR's game today. In solidarity with Palestine. The conflict there has all the same ingredients as the one in Ukraine - invasion, occupation, murder of civilians, destruction of homes and hospitals - and sieges.

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Palestine has been under siege by Israel - by air, land and sea, for decades. The US allows this, pumps billions into Israel to support its economy and military and uses its veto to block any meaningful action by the UN.

What's happening there is a disgrace to nations that collectively self identify as the 'West'. It stands in stark contradiction to 'our' claims to moral superiority, civilisation and democratic values. Has to be said.

In your conversation with Dr Zomlot, posted on social media, the issue of the rules against mixing sport and politics was raised. You are clearly aware of them. In this letter we will set out how your actions breached a broad range of regulations to which you and your club are bound. We encourage you to consider carefully your response to this letter because the content of your response will affect how we take the matter forward with Football's regulatory bodies, and others.

Football is a highly regulated sport. You are on record calling for increased regulation (<https://tinyurl.com/yckpasba>) so you will be aware of how important it is for you and FGRFC to comply with the regulatory system already in place. The regulations start at your own club and go upwards through the league and associations you are a part of, all of which are explicit in the requirement that their rules are incorporated into your own and followed.

FGRFC Club Charter

The FGRFC Club Charter contains commitments to equality. It commits the club to equal treatment regardless of "...gender, race or ethnic origin, age, religious belief, sexual orientation, disability or any other unjustifiable reason".

It states the club will not tolerate "...any such form of discriminatory behaviour (physical or verbal)" and breaches will be sanctioned.

Your charter further binds the club to equal treatment "...regardless of age, race, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, sex (gender), religion or belief or any other unjustifiable reason."

These statements are not qualified. There is no 'except regarding Israel' in brackets.

Any Jewish supporter who feels affinity with the State of Israel which, while giving citizens of all religions, ethnicities, and identities equal rights, was founded as the world's only Jewish state, will have been discriminated against according to your club charter, and any supporter who is connected to or has an affinity with the State of Israel will feel belittled, alienated and discriminated against by your actions.

Your action was hostile. You engaged in clear anti-Israel activity. You portrayed the complex issues of the Middle East in caricature and vilified Israel.

This activity was also witnessed by away supporters and the wider world of social media as you publicised it.

EFL

As a member of the English Football League, FGRFC must also comply with its rules. The EFL underlines its commitment to anti-discrimination noting “a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination and prejudiced behaviour in all forms”.

Your actions were clearly discriminatory and prejudiced; you cannot describe a country as engaging in ‘invasion, occupation, murder of civilians, destruction of homes and hospitals – and sieges’ and not be displaying discrimination and prejudice against them. You may feel it is justified (which we, for the record, do not), in any event the display of discrimination and prejudice remains.

EFL Chairman, Rick Parry, has said that “The EFL has a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination.

The EFL also has clear rules on what may be displayed on the pitchside advertising screens. Anything displayed on the perimeter board screens is advertising and any agreement to post on those screens is a ‘commercial contract’ under s.78 of EFL Regulations. These must not be at variance with the EFL’s own agreements. Your actions may well breach the terms agreed between the EFL and advertisers.

The Football Association

You are also required to abide by Football Association Rules (Football Association, A Constitution and Administration of the Association A1). FGRFC is classed as a ‘Participant’ under FA rules, as are Club Officials; “which for the avoidance of doubt shall include a Director”.

Participants must act in the best interests of the game, not bring the game into disrepute and not use “threatening, abusive, indecent or insulting words or behaviour. “(E3.1)

A breach of this provision is considered an Aggravated Breach when it includes references, express or implied, to, “ethnic origin, colour, race, nationality, religion or belief...” (E3.2)

Further, a Participant is expressly prohibited from “any act of discrimination by reason of ethnic origin, colour, race, nationality, religion or belief,” (E4)

The antipathy demonstrated by you and FGRFC at the match and on social media towards Israel and by extension its citizens and any who feel affinity with or support the State of Israel is a clear Aggravated Breach of FA rules.

You are also in Breach of the FA's Equality Policy which commits itself, clubs, and club officials to confront and eliminate discrimination based on nationality. (15-Equality Policy)

UEFA

Uefa is another organisation with rules you are explicitly bound by. You have, again, clearly breached these rules, starting with the Objective of the organisation, the most fundamental rule of all:

1 The objectives of UEFA shall be to:

b) promote football in Europe in a spirit of peace, understanding and fair play, without any discrimination on account of politics, gender, religion, race or any other reason;

Your action and statements promoted not peace and understanding but hostility and division. It was an incendiary intervention promoting and excusing violence and disorder; a clear, considered, premeditated, partisan and inflammatory call to action. It is not for Clubs and Officials to simply decide which rules and principles they decide to follow. There is a structure of obligations that they must follow if they want to participate in the game.

FIFA

At the pinnacle of rules to which you and FGRFC are bound are those of FIFA. You are, once again, in flagrant breach of the fundamental principles and regulations of FIFA.

FIFA is very clear:

Discrimination of any kind against a country, private person or group of people on account of race, skin colour, ethnic, national or social origin, gender, disability, language, religion, political opinion or any other opinion, wealth, birth or any other status, sexual orientation or any other reason is strictly prohibited and punishable by suspension or expulsion. (FIFA Statutes 4.1.)

FIFA remains neutral in matters of politics and religion. (4.2.)

Despite directly regulating football at a very different, international, level FIFA rules still apply to FGRFC: You are in breach of this provision.

Every person and organisation involved in the game of football is obliged to observe the Statutes and regulations of FIFA (8.3.)

Members of FIFA are required to ensure their own members abide by all of FIFA's rules (14.1.(d))

There is a requirement that member associations must have the following statutes:

Member associations' statutes must comply with the principles of good governance, and shall in particular contain, at a minimum, provisions relating to the following matters:

- (a) to be neutral in matters of politics and religion;
- (b) to prohibit all forms of discrimination;
- (c) to be independent and avoid any form of political interference; (15.)

And to underline the point:

- e) all relevant stakeholders must agree to respect the Laws of the Game, the principles of loyalty, integrity, sportsmanship and fair play as well as the Statutes, regulations and decisions of FIFA and of the respective confederation; (15)

You are in breach of these provisions

The FIFA Disciplinary Code is explicit on the subject:

2. For example, anyone who acts in any of the following ways may be subject to disciplinary measures:

- a) violating the basic rules of decent conduct;
- b) insulting a natural or legal person in any way, especially by using offensive gestures, signs or language;
- c) using a sports event for demonstrations of a non-sporting nature;
- d) behaving in a way that brings the sport of football and/or FIFA into disrepute; (Chapter 1 11. 2.)

We believe that using the language you did about Israel was a violation of basic rules of decent conduct. As a sovereign state, Israel is a legal person and it is therefore prohibited for you to insult it especially by offensive signs or language. You clearly used sports events for demonstrations of a non-sporting nature and you have brought the sport into disrepute. You are in clear and flagrant breach of the clean sweep of these provisions.

Regarding the behaviour of officials:

A player or official who, in the context of a match (including pre- and post-match) or competition, publicly incites others to hatred or violence will be

sanctioned with a ban on taking part in any football-related activity for no less than six months and with a minimum fine of CHF 5,000. In serious cases, in addition to the above sanctions and in particular if the infringement is committed using social networks and/or the mass media (such as the press, radio or television) or takes place on a matchday in or around a stadium, the minimum fine will be CHF 20,000. (Chapter 2 12. 4.)

You may feel what you did is justified, but it is against the rules. Saying that Israel's engagement with Palestinians has "all the same ingredients as the one in Ukraine - invasion, occupation, murder of civilians, destruction of homes and hospitals - and sieges" and that not taking more action against Israel is a "disgrace" is a clear and overt incitement to hatred and, possibly, violence.

The rules go further:

Any person who offends the dignity or integrity of a country, a person or group of people through contemptuous, discriminatory or derogatory words or actions (by any means whatsoever) on account of race, skin colour, ethnic, national or social origin, gender, disability, sexual orientation, language, religion, political opinion, wealth, birth or any other status or any other reason, shall be sanctioned with a suspension lasting at least ten matches or a specific period, or any other appropriate disciplinary measure. (Chapter 2 13. 1.)

That your words and actions were derogatory towards Israel is unarguable. You breached a core rule of FIFA which makes you liable for appropriate sanction.

The same point is made in FIFA's Code of Ethics which explicitly applies to all clubs and all officials within those clubs. The Code makes clear that:

Persons bound by this Code shall not offend the dignity or integrity of a country, private person or group of people through contemptuous, discriminatory or denigratory words or actions on account of race, skin colour, ethnicity, nationality, social origin, gender, disability, language, religion, political opinion or any other opinion, wealth, birth or any other status, sexual orientation or any other reason. (Code of Ethics 22. 1.)

To break that down; you clearly and deliberately offended the dignity and integrity of Israel through contemptuous, discriminatory and denigratory words and actions on account of nationality and political opinion.

There is another element of the Code which has particular relevance to this incident; abuse of position

Persons bound by this Code shall not abuse their position in any way, especially to take advantage of their position for private aims or gains. (25. 1.)

Your position on Israel is public and well-known. For example:

Forest Green Rovers FC Pledges To Boycott Puma, Chair Says Palestine "Greatest Injustice" of His Lifetime – BDS Movement May 4, 2020 (<https://bdsmovement.net/news/forest-green-rovers-fc-pledges-boycott-puma-chair-says-palestine-greatest-injustice-his>)

Why is household energy now all about Israel? - Ian Austin, The JC April 29 2022 (<https://www.thejc.com/lets-talk/all/why-is-household-energy-now-all-about-israel-426WZzNxwCC8OyixQJpAgk>)

Who is Dale Vince, the anti-Zionist owner of the 'world's greenest football club'? – Jerusalem Post April 26 2022 (<https://www.jpost.com/bds-threat/article-705168>)

It is clearly an issue you feel very strongly about, but it is not appropriate that you use your control of FGRFC to promote it. That is explicitly forbidden by FIFA.

And it does just seem to be Israel. While you reference Ukraine, in a comparison about Israel many will find repugnant, we are not aware of you using the bully pulpit of your control of FGRFC to stand up for that cause. Or the Uighurs, or the Kurds, or Syria, or the Western Sahara, or the Rohingya, or Yemen, or cut-off food supplies in Ethiopia. Only Israel seems to warrant this misuse of your public power.

There are also corporate governance implications. You control Forest Green Rovers Football Club Ltd via Green Britain Group Ltd which owns 1,287,525 shares in the club. Dale Vince directly only owns 10 shares. Green Britain Group is your holding company which also controls Ecotricity, the company you are well known for building from scratch into a significant green energy provider.

The point is that while you may have broad ownership and control, the interests and dedications of Dale Vince are not synonymous with the interest of Forest Green Rovers Football Club Ltd, or Green Britain Group Ltd, or Ecotricity. Those corporations have their own interests which are not represented by your actions in relation to Israel. This is particularly the case now that you have announced your plan to sell your interest in Ecotricity and devote yourself to politics.

You have your own view of corporate social responsibility. It is not necessarily one that your season ticket holders, with whom you have a legal contract, will share. You also

have contracts with your sponsors. Your actions may be in breach of agreements you have with sponsors, and cause a breach of agreements between EFL and sponsors. It may also put your sponsors in breach of their own corporate rules.

We have not discussed, debated or rebutted the content of your pronouncements in this letter; that is not its purpose. While we believe they are false, repugnant and offensive, this letter is about your multiple breaches of every set of rules you are bound by, as well as potential breaches of your corporate and commercial responsibilities.

We look forward to receiving a detailed response to our thorough setting out of your breaches. It will affect how we take this matter forward.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SG' followed by a stylized flourish.

Sam Green
Director
info@uklfi.com