Mr Richard Masters

Chief Executive

The Premier League

57 North Wharf Road

London W2 1HQ

20 April 2020

Dear Mr Masters,

**Re: Saudi Arabia PIB takeover of Newcastle United**

I am writing to you about the proposed acquisition of Newcastle United Football Club (NUFC) by Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund. I want to draw your attention to the wider context of this takeover in so far as it relates to Amnesty International’s human rights concerns and to the Premier League’s Owners and Directors Test.

While Saudi Arabia would not be the only country whose businesses have bought a significant stake in a Premier League Club, there are two aspects of the proposed acquisition that would set this apart. First, Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy in which the Crown Prince plays the role of King and has control of all economic, political and foreign relations. With oversight of the Kingdom’s Public Investment Fund, it is very unlikely that an important business transaction such as the takeover of a Premiership Club could happen without his authorisation.

More significantly, the Crown Prince has been using sporting events and personalities as a means of improving the Kingdom’s reputation following the grisly murder of the journalistJamal Khashoggi - widely believed to have taken place with his approval. Such positive associations with sporting events also distract attention from Saudi’s appalling human rights record, including the imprisonment and torture of women human rights defenders – women like Loujain al-Hathloul -  for advocating for equal rights and an end to discrimination.

I believe there are serious questions to address in determining whether the owners and directors of the company seeking to acquire NUFC are meeting standards that can protect the reputation and image of the game. If the Crown Prince, by virtue of his authority over Saudi Arabia’s economic relations and via control of his country’s sovereign wealth fund, becomes the beneficial owner of NUFC, how can this be positive for the reputation and image of the Premier League?

So long as these questions remain unaddressed, the Premier League is putting itself at risk of becoming a patsy of those who want to use the glamour and prestige of Premier League football to cover up actions that are deeply immoral, in breach of international law and at odds with the values of the Premier League and the global footballing community.

Yours sincerely,

  

Kate Allen

Director Amnesty International UK