Statement issued on behalf of the Qatar 2022 Bid Committee for the FIFA World Cup™

Response to the allegations published in a memorandum provided to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee of the House of Commons

Further to the publication by the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee ("the CMS Select Committee") of the House of Commons of a memorandum ("the Memorandum") provided to it by two reporters at The Sunday Times newspaper, the Qatar Football Association on behalf of the Qatar 2022 Bid Committee for the FIFA World Cup™ ("the Bid Committee") today published the following statement.

The Memorandum contains a series of serious, unsubstantiated and false allegations regarding the conduct of the Bid Committee. We would like to take this opportunity to address these allegations on behalf of the Bid Committee. However, before we consider the allegations made, we would like to point out two very significant omissions from the Memorandum, and two very important additional considerations, that together throw very considerable doubt on the credibility of the reporters, their motivations, and the extent to which the evidence placed by them before the CMS Select Committee can in any way be relied upon.

Firstly, the Memorandum refers to a series of alleged conversations between the reporters and a number of individuals connected with the bidding process for the 2018 and 2022 FIFA World Cup™ Finals. What the Memorandum does not state is that the reporters were posing as corrupt representatives of the United States bid and ostensibly soliciting further corruption from those with whom they were speaking, in return for substantial payments. It appears that many of these individuals were simply seeking to impress the supposed US representatives and persuade them that it would be worth their while engaging them. Evidently, in such circumstances very little reliability can be attached to the words of such individuals.

Secondly, more specifically, the Memorandum refers to allegations that Mr Michel Zen-Ruffinen allegedly made against the Bid Committee in the presence of the reporters (again we understand posing as corrupt representatives of the United States bid). However, the Memorandum fails to state that Mr Zen-Ruffinen immediately retracted those allegations both in a letter to the Bid Committee and a letter to The Sunday Times.

We find these omissions to be astonishing and a matter of the greatest concern. As a consequence of the omissions, the Memorandum did not place the information before the CMS Select Committee in a fair and balanced way.

In addition, the Memorandum refers to an alleged unidentified "whistleblower" who it is said formerly worked for the Bid Committee. It is true that (as is not uncommon in a process such as the bid) one or two people retained by the Bid Committee have left on acrimonious terms, although through no fault of the Bid Committee. The only explanation apparent to us is that one such person, plainly with a significant axe to grind against the Bid Committee, is the alleged whistleblower in question. We are mystified as to why anyone formerly in the Bid Committee’s employ would now seem intent on fabricating stories about the Bid Committee and would seriously question what his or her motivations are. In any event, we would caution anyone against placing reliance on uncorroborated statements made by an embittered ex-employee without a full and balanced understanding of that individual’s personal and professional
circumstances. Without knowing the identity of the alleged whistleblower, the details of the allegations made or the circumstances in which they have been made, it is impossible for the Bid Committee to respond to these allegations any further at this stage. However, we make ourselves fully available to any appropriate inquiry that seeks to rely on any evidence presented, or statements made, by the alleged "whistleblower" so that any such inquiry can be sure to have a full and balanced understanding.

Finally, in respect of the general unreliability of the allegations made against the Bid Committee in the Memorandum, we would point out that it has regrettably become customary for false allegations to abound in World Cup bids, such as the unfounded accusations allegedly made last year by Lord Triesman which caused him to resign from the English bidding team. In fact, the Bid Committee did not make any such false allegations against rival bids and instead focussed on working tirelessly to succeed in being selected to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup™.

With regards to the allegations made in the Memorandum, the Bid Committee would like to point out as follows.

1. As stated above, the allegations are completely false.

2. The Memorandum does not contain or refer to any first hand evidence of any bribes being paid or any impropriety on the part of the Bid Committee. All the allegations are hearsay and supposition. In addition, the allegations are wholly unsupported by any documentary material whatsoever.

3. These individuals make serious allegations against the Bid Committee but fail to give any substantiation of the allegations. For example, they do not state when the alleged bribes were to be paid, how the negotiations with the individuals concerned had been conducted or crucially how they came to know of the alleged bribes. On any proper view, their evidence is worthless.

4. The Memorandum states that in the view of the reporters, the individuals "had no reason to fabricate these allegations". We do not agree for the reasons set out in this Statement.

The Memorandum states that the reporters provided the material they have to FIFA. In fact, the Bid Committee reported the allegations made by The Sunday Times to FIFA itself and encouraged them to investigate. FIFA did so and their conclusion was completely to exonerate the Bid Committee.

The Memorandum also purports to explain the reasons for the decision of The Sunday Times not to publish in the newspaper some of the serious allegations set out in the Memorandum. It states that this was on the basis that "none of the three people who made allegations against Qatar was ever likely to be willing to appear as a witness".

The reporters will know (as the Bid Committee was advised by its lawyers) that the newspaper would have a defence to any libel claim brought in respect of the publication of these allegations if it could show that it constituted responsible journalism to do so and that publication was in the public interest. It would be quite possible to advance such a defence without any of the three individuals mentioned giving evidence.
However, it must have been plain to the newspaper and the reporters that so unreliable and unsubstantiated were the allegations, that it would not have constituted responsible journalism for these allegations to be published. It is extremely unfortunate that the reporters provided these allegations to the CMS Select Committee with the evident intention of having them published to the world, as they did in the Memorandum.

For The Sunday Times to suggest that "nobody of sound mind could be persuaded the support for Qatar was based purely on merit, because Qatar is a "small desert state with a minuscule population, no football traditions and hostile summer temperatures" is not only insulting, but exemplifies the sustained and unbalanced reporting that the Bid Committee has been subjected to by that newspaper.

The publication of the Memorandum on the website of the CMS Select Committee has caused enormous and wholly unjustified potential damage to the Bid Committee and the individuals on it. The aim of the Bid Committee has always been to show that the Middle East is a realistic option for staging the FIFA World Cup™ and it has worked extremely hard to bring the tournament to the Middle East for the first time. This is something of which the Bid Committee and the people of Qatar are extremely proud. To have this achievement tarnished by completely unsubstantiated and false allegations and for those allegations to be propounded by the Parliament of the United Kingdom is something we find distressing, insulting and incomprehensible.

Since participating and succeeding in the bidding process, the Bid Committee has been subject to a variety of serious allegations. However, none of these allegations has ever been substantiated. Indeed, they have all been false. Moreover, they have always consisted of generalised allegations of wrong-doing. No specific examples of alleged wrong-doing on the part of the Bid Committee, such as a specific payment made to a specific individual, have ever been identified to them. Advancing allegations against the Bid Committee in such a way is particularly unfair and in such circumstances, it is very hard for the Bid Committee to refute such vague allegations other than with a generalised denial.

The Bid Committee welcomes a thorough investigation into the allegations made against it. However, such an investigation must surely only be carried out by a properly constituted body with due authority and independence where our side of the story can be heard. It is wholly inappropriate for any examination of the Bid Committee’s affairs to be based on unsubstantiated hearsay and inaccurate journalism.

The Bid Committee devoted considerable resources to its bid, which was necessary given that it was less well known internationally than most of its competitors. Moreover, Qatar wants the 2022 FIFA World Cup™ to be the best and the most professional in all aspects. At all times, the Bid Committee has observed rigorous propriety and acted entirely within the rules prescribed by FIFA for the bidding process. The bid team included professionals from all over the world who worked with tireless endeavour and innovation and addressed the modern aspirations of world football to win for Qatar the right to host the FIFA World Cup™. The whole team and the whole of Qatar is very proud of that achievement. What is concerning and unfair is that there appear to be those who are unable to accept that a team from a country like Qatar could perform in this way and are ready - on the basis of no evidence - to assume the worst.
Qatar is excited at the prospect of hosting one of the world's greatest sporting events and is determined to deliver a World Cup truly deserving of football fans around the world.

ENDS