

Voices > Editorials

Usually boycotting a world sporting event would seem extreme, but this is Putin's Russia we're talking about

The reality of Russian foreign policy is in such sharp, indeed grotesque, contrast to the civilised, cuddly image symbolised in Zabivaka, the friendly wolf adopted as the mascot of this World Cup

Editorial | @IndyVoices | Thursday 14 June 2018 16:28 | 2 comments

As far as the Russians are concerned, there is not much sign of a common international front expressing its unrelenting displeasure and anger at their policies. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salam of Saudi Arabia is a high-profile guest at the opening events, and the first game between Russian and Saudi squads. (Russia and Saudi Arabia being at the bottom both of the international leagues for human rights as well as footballing prowess.)

If nothing else, the **Fifa World Cup** in **Russia** proves conclusively that sport and politics, at least in certain hands, mix rather well.

The opening ceremony and pre-publicity for the tournament amounted to a virtual global party political broadcast for **Vladimir Putin**. As **Boris Johnson** pointed out some time ago, and wisely for a change, the celebrations in Moscow have uncomfortable echoes of the 1936 Berlin Olympics in their propaganda value. The international community should have thought again about the Russian World Cup.

ll detained in
r LGBT+ protest

The reality of Russian foreign policy is in such sharp, indeed grotesque, contrast to the civilised, cuddly image symbolised in Zabivaka, the friendly wolf adopted as the mascot of this championship. There is no such thing, in the natural world nor in international diplomacy, as a friendly wolf. Perhaps that is Mr Putin's idea of satire, a nice twist on the old line of "a wolf in sheep's clothing".

The international community has also chosen to ignore Russia's shameful domestic record on human rights – a home loss, you might say. As the opening ceremony got under way, Amnesty International tweeted: "Human rights have taken a significant nose-dive in #Russia in recent years, making it impossible to ignore the rampant human rights violations happening in the host country of the 21st Fifa #WorldCup".

There is torture; harassment of religious minorities; violations of free trials and free speech; commonplace ill-treatment of refugees and migrants; domestic violence decriminalised and LGBT+ rights disregarded. There is also the continued brutality and subjugation of the Chechen people. The behaviour of the "ultra" Russian football hooligans confirms the streak of racism and nationalism that disfigures Russian society, and which the authorities all too happily tolerate.

