

UKRAINIAN HANDBALL FEDERATION

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OFFICIAL PROTEST

regarding the IHF Council decision of 24 March 2026 on the return of Russian and Belarusian youth national teams.

Dear Mr President,

Dear Members of the IHF Council,

The Ukraine Handball Federation (UHF) hereby expresses its formal and resolute protest against the decision of the IHF Council of 24 March 2026, which authorises Russian and Belarusian youth national teams to organise and participate in self-arranged friendly matches and tournaments.

The UHF also firmly objects to any further steps aimed at returning Russian and Belarusian teams to official international handball competitions, which, according to public information released by the IHF, are scheduled to be considered at the next Council meeting on 6 May 2026.

The UHF considers this decision premature, unfounded, and incompatible with the moral responsibility of the international sporting community in the context of the ongoing war against Ukraine.

Our position is based on the following grounds:

1. Ongoing armed aggression and grave violations of international law

The armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, supported by the Republic of Belarus, has not ceased. Under such circumstances, any relaxation of restrictions concerning representatives of the aggressor states is unacceptable. The continuation of this war, which has caused immense human suffering, loss of life, and widespread destruction, renders any steps toward sporting reintegration ethically unacceptable and institutionally irresponsible.

We further emphasise that this war has already claimed the lives of hundreds of Ukrainian athletes and coaches. Among them are members of the Ukrainian handball community, including **Mykhailo Tsap**, a former Ukraine national team player, player and coach, and **Oleksandr Perepelytsia**, a handball player who was killed while defending Ukraine. In these circumstances, any move toward restoring representatives of the aggressor states to the international sporting environment is not only premature, but also contrary to the most basic principles of moral responsibility and respect for the memory of those who have been killed.

2. Absence of any substantive change in the factual circumstances

The IHF refers to the recommendation of the Olympic Summit of 11 December 2025 as part of the basis for this decision. At the same time, the objective circumstances facing Ukraine and Ukrainian sport have not improved. Ukraine's sports infrastructure continues to be destroyed, while Ukrainian athletes, including children and youth athletes, are forced to train and prepare under constant danger and the threat of missile attacks.

3. Insufficiency and unverifiability of the declaration mechanism

The requirement for athletes, coaches and officials to sign declarations confirming the absence of links to military or security structures and non-involvement in ongoing international conflicts cannot be regarded as a sufficient safeguard. In practice, such checks are extremely difficult and, in many cases, effectively impossible to verify independently and credibly, especially in systems where sport is closely intertwined with state structures and used as an instrument of state policy and propaganda.

4. Threat to the consistency and integrity of international handball governance

On 4 March 2022, the IHF Council decided to suspend all teams, officials, referees, lecturers and experts from Russia and Belarus from participation in IHF events and activities until further notice. The new decision of 24 March 2026 effectively creates an exception to that sanctions regime for youth teams, while the general restrictions introduced in 2022 formally remain in force. In the view of the UHF, such an approach undermines the consistency, credibility and integrity of international handball governance.

5. An unacceptable signal to the international sporting community

Authorising self-arranged friendly matches and tournaments is not a neutral technical step. It is a political and institutional signal. This decision creates a pathway toward the gradual normalisation of the participation of representatives of the aggressor states in international handball, despite the absence of any real change in the circumstances that led to their suspension.

In light of the above, the UHF respectfully but firmly calls upon the IHF Council to:

1. Revoke the decision of 24 March 2026

Immediately cancel the authorisation granted to Russian and Belarusian youth national teams to organise and participate in self-arranged friendly matches and tournaments.

2. Exclude any return to official competitions

Categorically refrain from adopting any decision that would allow the return of Russian and Belarusian national teams to official IHF competitions, including World Championships and qualification events, for as long as the armed aggression against Ukraine continues and the fundamental norms of international law remain violated.

3. Maintain the full force of the sanctions regime introduced on 4 March 2022

Ensure that the IHF Council decision of 4 March 2022 remains fully applicable, without exceptions based on age category or format of participation, until genuine and verifiable grounds for reconsideration arise.

Sport cannot be separated from responsibility when one sovereign state continues its armed aggression against another. The UHF calls upon the IHF Council to act in accordance with the principles of justice, consistency, institutional responsibility, and respect for the victims of this war, and to refrain from any steps that could be perceived as legitimising representatives of the aggressor states within the international handball community.

Yours sincerely,

President of Ukrainian Handball Federation

Andrii Melnyk

