

**Hamdan, Mohammad Said. Interviewed 2012. Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.<sup>1</sup>**

An important story in the history of the Palestinian sports movement is our admission to the International Olympic Committee. An established law is that a state cannot become a member of the IOC unless it was supported by a recognised Olympic federation. In our case, thank God, we had more than one Olympic federation to support us when we were in Kuwait. In Moscow in 1980, we attended along with the late Sheikh Fahad al-Ahmad al-Sabah, and he took 7 or 8 young Palestinians on his own expense. He took a stance that day. Kuwait had a law preventing travel abroad at the state's expense for non-Kuwaiti citizens. But Sheikh Fahed imposed his position on the government, and we travelled with him at his personal expense and the expense of the Kuwaiti government.

In Moscow, the negotiations for Palestine's entry to the IOC began. How? The Spanish ambassador in Moscow at the time was a man called Samaranch, and he was a candidate for the IOC presidency. Sheikh Fahed al-Ahmad, who was the President of the Asian Olympic Council, the Kuwaiti Football Association, and the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee, met with him and told him: "I guarantee you the support of the Arab, Islamic, and Asian countries. Our relationships with these countries are genuine and close and that he shall encourage them to give their votes, but Palestine would need to be admitted to the IOC." Something like a deal was struck. I even told Sheikh Fahed al-Ahmad afterwards that I predict that he will personally become a member of the IOC and, although he laughed that off at the time, he did later become a member.

Now in 1989, when Sheikh Fahed al-Ahmad hosted an Islamic Games and invited 54 Islamic countries to it under the patronage of the late Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad, he invited Samaranch, who had become the President of the IOC in 84 I think.<sup>2</sup> Sheikh Fahed went up to him and told him "I must remind you of your promise. Where is Palestine Mr Samaranch? You have been a President of the IOC for several years and nothing has happened so far". So Samaranch then asked for a letter from brother Abu Ammar (Yasser Arafat) requesting membership in the IOC. At the time, brother Ibrahim who was chairing the Palestinian Sports Council in Kuwait called us and recounted the story, saying that Sheikh Fahed asks Abu Ammar to send a letter. So we sent a fax to Abu Ammar asking for a letter from him (the fax was still current back then!). Abu Ammar sent an official letter addressed to Samaranch, saying that Palestine has youth engaged in sports and we have the following federations and clubs, and we ask for etc...

Samaranch then told Sheikh Fahed: "tomorrow, I will organise a press conference. Get one of the journalists to ask me: why hasn't Palestine been admitted to the IOC despite the fact that it has several sports federations that

---

<sup>1</sup> This work is made available under a Creative Commons 4.0 International Licence, and must be used accordingly. Please see citation guidelines on the About Us page.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, Samaranch became the President of the IOC in 1980.

are internationally recognised?" So we asked an Iraqi journalist brother to do this- he was famous but I forgot his name- and he posed the question to Samaranch. I was there at the time, and I witnessed Samaranch answer that we have not forgotten Palestine and it has submitted an application for admission and it has more than 12 recognised federations and it will become a member soon. This did happen indeed, in 90-91 as far as I can remember, and Palestine became a member of the IOC. This was due to the efforts of the Kuwaiti branch of the Palestinian Sports Council and Sheikh Fahed al-Ahmad above all. To him we owe our presence in international federations, whether in the Moscow Olympiad or in Los Angeles and Seoul. Honestly, I would like to say that we should name one of the sports stadiums in Palestine in honour of the late Sheikh Fahed al-Ahmad...