

Mr. Eric Labrador, President of the Puerto Rican Soccer Federation (FPF)

Dear Mr. Labrador:

On behalf of the Women's National Soccer teams of Puerto Rico, we write you this letter with a sense of urgency. We want to express our deepest concerns regarding the goals that have been set and the direction of women's soccer in our country.

As proud representatives of Puerto Rico at the international level, we are at a crucial stage. The next decisions made will determine the trajectory of women's soccer in Puerto Rico, whether that be success or failure.

The petitions presented in this letter are not meant to satisfy any personal interest. The core of our team has been working together since we were on the U-17 team and our unselfish commitment has led us to make history for our country. Our only interest is to advance the future of women's soccer in Puerto Rico. This is a very serious matter for us. We have invested a great deal, for many years, to reach where we are now. We see the dreams of the young girls of our island who one day hope to compete legitimately against the best national teams in the world. We know that this can be accomplished because we, as Puerto Rican women, have the heart and the drive to do so. However, in order to do this, we need you, in conjunction with the members of the executive committee, to seriously consider how to reach these goals and establish practical ways to lead us to these goals. We need the commitment of the Federation both in word and action and we eagerly anticipate your response. If we are all united for a common purpose, leaving behind selfish interest, we will reach a World Cup. Puerto Rico will finally participate in a Women's World Cup - a milestone that we all wish to see accomplished.

The biggest challenge we face is our preparation, or lack thereof, for international competitions. We, as players, are totally committed. As every athlete that aspires to greatness on the world stage knows, what we do in competitions is a direct reflection of the preparation that has occurred before. Our performance on the biggest stage depends on the sacrifice and intensity given to our daily training.

In 2015, the Puerto Rican Women's National Team (PRWNT) clinched a spot in the final round of the CONCACAF Olympic Qualifiers for the 2016 Olympics in Brazil. We made history by becoming the first Puerto Rican team to make the final round of a CONCACAF qualifying tournament, but that experience also showed us that teams who consistently prepare with international friendlies for important competitions are those that perform at the highest level in the most important competitions. Unfortunately, even though our team made history in 2015, we have not participated in any international game that

has not been in official competition since that time. At the end of 2015, the PRWNT found itself at #94 in the FIFA World Ranking. It is important to mention that this ranking is another historical feat accomplished by this team, as no previous team from Puerto Rico had ever been ranked in the top 100 teams in the FIFA World Ranking. Despite this accomplishment and having worked so hard to reach it, the PRWNT is not currently in any FIFA ranking. This regression in FIFA ranking is entirely due to a lack of international competition. We as players do not understand how we are meant to continue the trajectory of excellence that we have begun, with all of the sacrifice and work that we have put in, if there is no investment from those in power to accomplish these goals. Though the Federation has not chosen to participate, the invitations to compete internationally have been plentiful. As we approached an important competition in 2017 and 2018, we could have competed against various opponents with good FIFA rankings: #69 Philippines, #50 Jordan, #40 Chile and #36 Argentina. It could be said it would cost us greatly to participate in these games, but as we previously stated, where we put our effort and invest our resources is what affords us opportunity to be successful. Some of the aforementioned teams, Philippines, Chile and Argentina, were even willing to come to Puerto Rico decreasing the cost incurred.

Furthermore, for the past three (3) years the PRWNT has not participated in any game that has not been an official competition. We know that the “FIFA Forward Program”, has made financial provisions specifically designated for the development of youth and women’s soccer. These funds should have been used to fund international friendlies that would further continue our development. However, it is unclear what happened to these funds.

In the past, when we as players have asked for international friendly games or to participate in training trips, the answer has always been that “There is not money”. Mr. President, this is not possible. Each year, for the last eight years, FIFA has given the FPF \$400,000 for youth and women’s soccer. Throughout this time, the PRWNT has not played even one international friendly game. We ask again, where are these funds?

We know that the FPF shares our same goals and that together we want to see these goals become a reality. We had our sights set on the 2019 Women’s World Cup in France. While other national teams from CONCACAF were preparing for qualifiers with various international games, our team did not participate in any. We did not even have the chance to play together as a team until our first game in the first round of Caribbean World Cup Qualifying. We cannot purport to maintain a level of excellence in competition if we are not preparing adequately.

Knowing what it takes to reach our goals, we cannot give ourselves the luxury of cutting corners. An adequate training plan requires sacrifice, purpose, intention, focus and an investment of financial resources. Participation in at least four (4) international friendly games each year is non-negotiable. We must intentionally choose competitions with teams that will not just test and prepare us to play at the higher level, but that will also help us reach and maintain a competitive FIFA World Ranking.

It is also necessary that in preparation for international competition, whether friendly or official, the national team must participate in training camps at least three (3) weeks before the competition with the purpose of increasing intensity of training and focus. These are the best practices set forth by successful teams with competitive rankings. Challenging? Yes. Impossible? No.

Some of us have played both at high levels in college and professionally. We know that this is the minimum that is required to be successful both individually and as a team; we are willing and ready for this challenge. Nevertheless, we need this to be a joint effort and shared vision. As high level athletes, our ambition and goals is to lift the name of Puerto Rico high in the world of soccer, but we need the proper support in leadership, competitive training opportunities, coaching and funds. Only through these supports can we anticipate reaching a higher FIFA World Ranking.

We have been extremely satisfied with the direction and vision that our most recent coaching staff offered the women's national teams. Those of us that have competed at the professional level can give testimony to the high standard that the coaching staff demanded. With the training regimen that they provided, we believe that we could continue improving our game. We were very thankful to the Federation for its decision to name the aforementioned coaching staff. For the first time in the history of Puerto Rico, we had a coaching staff that believed in us and in the future of women's soccer in Puerto Rico. A coaching staff that sacrificed so much (more than you could imagine) to be on the island and establish a system that has greatly helped us grow as players. The motivation and passion from each member of the coaching staff had was incredible. Following their ideas and level of professionalism, we are sure that reaching a Women's World Cup is not out of the question.

Sadly, although we as players were the ones interacting with the coaching staff each day, and we were the ones that were on the field representing our country, we did not have any say in the FPF's most recent decision to terminate our head coach and his coaching staff. We understand that decisions made by the head coach reach beyond what happens on the field, but we also need you to understand that we are the ones that benefit or fail as

a result of the coaching staff. For this reason, we demand a voice in the selection of our coaching staff. This is of the utmost importance due to the influence of the head coach on the development of individual and team talent.

We would also like to mention other points that need consideration in the greater development plan for women's soccer on the island. This includes the general well-being of the players that, without self-interest, invest their time, effort and personal finances to represent the island of Puerto Rico. As leaders and representatives of soccer in Puerto Rico, the Federation must have a plan to support our players including subsidies for transportation and diet expenses, especially for those players who come from the western side of island to practice. Not only should this plan cover the daily cost for trainings, but it should also consider the cost of leaving jobs (without pay) during times of competition. Adequate training equipment and the coordination of efforts aimed at consistently meeting the progress of the PRWNT is another concern. All of these considerations might seem impossible at the moment, but if we are intentional and we commit as an organization to articulate goals and establish steps in attaining them, they can be achieved.

We need a firm, defined and intentional commitment from the FPF. Our challenges as players demand a level of commitment that is required to diligently represent Puerto Rico. Anything less than this is not acceptable. Our island deserves the highest representation and we are willing to put in the effort to accomplish this.

President Labrador, this is our general vision, but the conversation needs to be had by all invested parties in order to put a detailed plan of action together. This action plan will be what allows us to successfully reach our goals.

By this letter we are requesting a meeting with the President of the Federation, Mr. Labrador, and all of the members of the Executive Committee, with the players of the PRWNT and the public media of the country. In this meeting we will discuss the following:

1. Transparency in the votes cast regarding the wasted opportunities for international friendly games against Jordan and Argentina.
2. Representation from the PRWNT when discussing Federation statutes.
3. Maintaining/reinstating the coaching staff, headed by Shek Borkowski.
4. Status updates of potential upcoming international friendly games against Argentina and Chile, both of which are waiting for a response from the FPF.
5. Continuity for the PRWNT by maintaining the team active with friendlies and training camps throughout the year.

6. Integration of players residing in the United States and abroad at least three weeks before any competition.
7. Arrival of the PRWNT one week before any competition to the place where said competition will take place.
8. Player pay for international games as well as stipends for trainings and camps.

Respectfully,
 Players of the Women's National Teams of Puerto Rico

Jugadoras de la Selección Superior Femenina de Fútbol:

Nicole Rodríguez

Karina Socarrás

Laura Suárez

Selimar Pagán

Cristina Torres

Gabriela Vaquer

Dalyaliz Rosario

María Guerrero

Ashley Johnson

Mariana López

Paola Goyco

Mirianeé Zaragoza

Adriana Tirado "Tuti"

Micaela Castain

Marcela Robinson

Jugadoras de la Selección U-17 Femenina de Fútbol:

Mercedes Fisher

Yarielys Maldonado

Isabel Cacho

Bianca Rosado

Pamela Pérez

Juliette Wolpert

María Luisa Colón

Soleil Maldonado

Gabrielle Cimino

Daniela Pérez