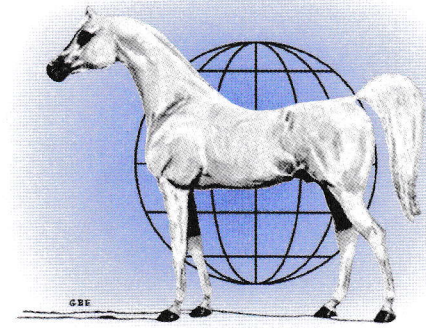


World Arabian Horse Organization

Registered Charity No: 278988



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10 April 2017

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Dear Mr. Ingmar De Vos

SUBJECT: SERIOUS HORSE WELFARE ISSUES IN ENDURANCE

As the President of the World Arabian Horse Organization (WAHO), and on behalf of the Executive Committee and all our Members, I am writing to you in your capacity as the President of the Fédération Equestre Internationale (F.E.I.) to express our profound concerns about the continuing deaths and injuries of horses competing in endurance events, in particular at certain venues in the United Arab Emirates. In February 2017, at the WAHO Conference and General Assembly in Bahrain, I brought this to the attention of our Members, and assured them that the WAHO Executive Committee would be contacting the F.E.I. to request that firm and prompt action is taken to find a solution, and quickly, to this serious situation. That is the purpose of this letter.

WAHO, a registered Charity based in the United Kingdom, was founded in 1970 and is the only internationally recognised governing body authorised to regulate the registration of Arabian horses in all countries world-wide. There are now 65 Member and Applying Registering Authority Member nations with WAHO- approved Arabian stud books, together with 19 additional countries whose Arabians are registered for them by neighbouring registries. WAHO also has 24 Associate Members in 19 countries, and some 2,000 Individual Associate Members in over 80 countries worldwide.

The issue of equine welfare in its many and varied aspects has become increasingly important to WAHO and its members over the years. From all the available published evidence and information, it is increasingly evident that many Arabian horses are suffering and indeed dying in endurance competitions, a sport in which 'our' Arabian horses are very much involved. It is clear from the F.E.I.'s own records, as well as from media reports, that since the beginning of this year at least 11 horses competing in the U.A.E have suffered catastrophic injuries in certain endurance races. We use the word 'races' advisedly due to the very high average speeds being recorded in some competitions. Of course we never even hear about those horses injured or dying during training, or soon after a competition from which they have been 'retired' by their riders and therefore not presented for veterinary inspection. In our opinion this rate of attrition amounts to serious abuse of all the horses taking part. All of us within WAHO are very disturbed by this chain of events.

As the World Arabian Horse Organization, we are of course especially concerned about the fate of the many Arabian and derivative Arabian horses involved. It is deeply shocking and it simply cannot be allowed to continue without our voices being raised in defence of these horses, who have no voice of their own and no choice but to go at the speeds dictated by their riders. Arabian horses have tremendous heart, tremendous courage, and tremendous bravery, which is why they are the chosen breed for endurance. To stay silent and effectively abandon them to their fate would be to go against WAHO's core values and objectives. Our Arabian horses, indeed any horses, do not deserve to be sacrificed on the altar of sport, nor to suffer such ill-treatment at the hands of humans – who should know better.

At the same time, WAHO recognises the efforts of HH Sheikh Sultan Bin Zayed Al Nayahan to improve horse welfare in endurance events in UAE through the development of the Boudheib Initiative, where steps have been taken to tailor the competition to the challenging natural terrain and environment, and to protect horses from their impact by introducing protocols including strict speed and recovery parameters. In a very short space of time this has shown how a few relatively simple changes can make a really dramatic difference to the welfare of the horses, considerably reducing the need for veterinary intervention. HH Sheikh Sultan is to be congratulated for having the best interests of the horses at heart and we very much hope that this Initiative will be strongly supported by the F.E.I. It is WAHO's view that radical steps such as these are urgently required at other endurance venues in rides run under both national and international rules. This, together with an overhaul of the current rules and in particular reducing the permitted speed, would return endurance competition to its true origins - a sport which has the respectful partnership between horse and rider at its heart, with a high percentage of completion rates by horses that are sound, unharmed and fully fit to continue.

WAHO also has serious concerns about the malpractices and flagrant rule breaking in several of the Group VII countries. This includes the apparently increasing number of positive dope tests and we do applaud the F.E.I. for uncovering these activities and taking disciplinary measures against the perpetrators. We would suggest that consideration might be given to instigating dope testing prior to rides, rather than only afterwards, which could perhaps go a long way to preventing this abuse of the unfortunate horses subject to these practices, which can put them at higher risk of injury or death.

WAHO does of course fully recognise that the F.E.I., in the interest of equine welfare, has already tried various measures in a series of attempts to rectify this serious situation, and has been working closely with the U.A.E. National Federation. Unfortunately so far it seems this has been to no avail, because despite these ongoing negotiations the mistreatment and deaths of the horses continues. We are also aware that the F.E.I. has recently taken additional steps to address the possible risk factors involved in on-course catastrophic injuries. We understand the Global Endurance Injuries Surveillance project involves new research into risk factors and bone injuries, whether these are due to incorrect or inadequate training

or to the combination of high speeds, ride conditions and the current rules under which most National and F.E.I. rides are run. It is our sincere hope that this research will improve horse welfare.

Therefore, WAHO is respectfully calling on the responsible persons at the F.E.I. to take firm and prompt action to put into place new strict measures which will definitely prevent another dismal catalogue of catastrophic injuries and unacceptable practices, and to do this well before the next Middle East endurance season gets under way. We also urge the F.E.I. to review the current qualification criteria for both horses and riders, which we consider is putting more pressure and stress on the horses by requiring them to complete more long rides within set periods, which combined with the necessary training is undoubtedly subjecting them to additional and possibly detrimental physical challenges. Furthermore, from the positive results achieved at Boudheib, it is clear even to the layman that killing the speed prevents killing the horses and we would specifically request that this particular issue is addressed as a matter of urgency. This would demonstrate to the offending parties that the attrition rate has to stop, that it will not be tolerated anymore and that equine welfare is of paramount concern in endurance competition.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Pond', with a stylized, cursive script.

Peter Pond
President, World Arabian Horse Organization