

INTERNATIONAL JUDO FEDERATION

DISCIPLINARY COMMISSION

Richard Galea Debono (President)

Frédérique Jossinet (Vice President)

Raguib Faissal (Member)

Case Reference: DIS2026-02 SYR

In the disciplinary proceedings initiated pursuant to Articles 16.1 and 16.2(b) of the IJF Disciplinary Code

against

MR FADI DARWISH

Judoka, Syria (hereinafter: the “Respondent”)

DECISION

I. PROCEDURAL HISTORY

1. By reasoned request submitted pursuant to Article 16.2(b) of the IJF Disciplinary Code (the “Code”), Mr Marius L. Vizer, President of the International Judo Federation (the “IJF”), requested the Chairperson of the IJF Disciplinary Commission to initiate disciplinary proceedings against the Respondent. The request was accompanied by six annexes, comprising the Respondent’s correspondence with the IJF Secretary General and the IJF President, a screenshot of a social media publication made by the Respondent, and the correspondence exchanged between the Respondent, Ms Sanda Aldass and the IJF Integrity Unit between 14 July 2026 and 13 August 2026.
2. Having considered the reasoned request and the material annexed thereto, the President of the IJF Disciplinary Commission, determined that a reasonable suspicion of a disciplinary offence existed and formally initiated disciplinary proceedings pursuant to Articles 16.1 and 16.2(b) of the Code.
3. By Formal Notice of Charge and Initiation of Disciplinary Proceedings dated Budapest, 17 August 2026, served on the Respondent by email through the IJF General Secretariat under Article 50.1 of the Code (the “Notice of Charge”), the Respondent was informed of the initiation of the proceedings, the conduct forming their subject, the charge and its legal basis, his procedural rights under Articles 15.2 to 15.6 of the Code, the procedural warning under Article 26.4, and his right under Article 19.1(e) to request a disciplinary hearing within eight (8) days of receipt. No provisional measure was requested or imposed.
4. The Notice of Charge expressly recorded that the initiation of proceedings is not a finding that a disciplinary offence has been committed, that the proceedings are confined to the alleged burning of the judogi, and that the separate allegations raised by the Respondent and Ms Sanda

Aldass against the Syrian Judo Federation and its officials would neither be determined nor prejudiced by these proceedings.

5. The Respondent subsequently filed a Formal Written Defence (the “Defence”), accompanied by documentary exhibits comprising: a photograph identified as depicting the training judogi concerned (Exhibit 1); the Respondent’s disclosure correspondence with the IJF Secretary General, Ms Lisa Allan, together with a screenshot of a related public statement (Exhibit 2, in parts); a screenshot of a message from the Secretary General of the Syrian Judo Federation, Mr Mohammad Boulad, containing a draft public “clarification statement” (Exhibit 3); a message and voice-note transcript from Mr Omar Derbas, a member of the Syrian Olympic Commission (Exhibit 4); and WhatsApp correspondence between the Respondent and officials of the Syrian Judo Federation (Exhibit 5, eight pages). The case file further contains the letter of recommendation issued by the IJF President in favour of Ms Sanda Aldass and the Respondent.
6. The Respondent subsequently filed a supplementary statement providing a detailed chronology of the events of the day of the incident and referring the Commission to video documentation of the act (duration: one minute and sixteen seconds), accessible via a link supplied by the Respondent. The supplementary statement is summarised at Section IV below.
7. Several exhibits are in the Arabic language. Working English translations and summaries of the Arabic-language material are set out at Section V below.
8. The language of the proceedings is English. The proceedings are not public, in accordance with Article 20.1 of the Code.

II. THE CHARGE AND ITS LEGAL BASIS

9. The proceedings concern the allegation that, following a dispute involving officials of the Syrian Judo Federation, the Respondent deliberately burned his judogi in front of the premises of the Syrian Judo Federation as a symbolic act of protest. The charge rests in particular on the Respondent’s own written acknowledgement of that act, contained in an email of 8 July 2026 addressed to the IJF Secretary General, and on related social media material. The social media material is relied upon as evidence and context only; it is not advanced as a separate disciplinary charge.
10. The conduct is charged as a potential disciplinary offence under Article 3.1 of the Code, read together with Articles 1.3, 1.4 and 1.6 of the Code and the standards of conduct set out in the IJF Code of Ethics, in particular the section entitled “Respect for People and the Facilities”, which requires judoka to exercise self-control and remain disciplined in all circumstances, to refrain from abusing equipment, to respect the facilities and places made available to them, and to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with their role as representatives of judo.
11. The questions the Commission is called upon to determine are accordingly whether the conduct: (a) was contrary to the moral, ethical or sporting spirit of judo, or affected the image and reputation of judo, within the meaning of Article 1.4 of the Code; (b) constituted a culpable failure to exercise self-control and remain disciplined in all circumstances; (c) constituted abuse or deliberate destruction of judo equipment contrary to the IJF Code of Ethics; and (d) was inconsistent with the standards expected of a judoka and of a person representing the sport of judo.

12. The reasoned request emphasises, and the Commission accepts as the correct framework of analysis, that: (i) the judogi is not an ordinary item of clothing but the principal uniform and equipment of the judoka, carrying particular symbolic and educational importance; (ii) the fact that the judogi may have been the Respondent's personal property does not of itself remove the conduct from disciplinary assessment, the relevant question being the manner, purpose and context of its deliberate destruction and the possible effect on the image and moral values of judo; and (iii) the expressed motive of protest does not exclude disciplinary responsibility, although it may be considered in assessing culpability, seriousness and proportionality.
13. These proceedings are not based on the fact that the Respondent and Ms Aldass submitted a complaint, criticised officials of the Syrian Judo Federation or requested IJF intervention. The initiation of proceedings rests solely on separate conduct voluntarily disclosed by the Respondent which is itself capable of constituting a disciplinary offence. The allegations made by the Respondent and Ms Aldass remain subject to separate consideration under the appropriate IJF governance, integrity, safeguarding or disciplinary mechanisms and are neither determined nor prejudged by the present decision.

III. SUMMARY OF THE FACTS AS PRESENTED

14. The following summary is drawn from the case file, namely the reasoned request and its annexes, the Notice of Charge, the Defence and its exhibits. It records the facts as presented by the parties; where a fact is contested or rests solely on one party's account, this is indicated. Nothing in this section constitutes a finding of the Commission.
15. The Respondent is a Syrian judoka and certified judo coach who resettled in the Netherlands as a refugee. According to the Defence, he founded a self-funded initiative ("Syrian Eagles") to train refugee athletes and, together with his wife, Ms Sanda Aldass, subsequently supported the IOC Refugee Olympic Team project managed by the IJF for approximately three years. On 11 June 2026, the IJF President issued a letter of recommendation in favour of Ms Aldass and the Respondent in connection with their planned return to Syria; by email of 18 June 2026 the Presidential Office further suggested contacting Mr Gonzalo Barrio of the International Olympic Commission.
16. According to the account given by Ms Aldass and the Respondent in an email of 8 July 2026 to the IJF President, on or about 7 July 2026 they attended the headquarters of the Syrian Judo Federation and presented the IJF President's letter of support. They allege that Mr Mouhanad (Mohannad) Sham, a board member responsible for liaison with the IJF, met them with hostility and mockery, dismissed the validity of the letter, used highly offensive language directed at the IJF Presidency and at them personally, and threatened to remove them from the premises and the national team training facilities, in the presence of other board members who did not intervene. These allegations are made by the Respondent and Ms Aldass and have not been the subject of findings in these or any other proceedings.
17. The Defence attributes the alleged hostility to prior events: the Respondent states that, while working with the IJF Refugee Programme, he declined requests for inclusion in the IOC Refugee Team, including a direct telephone request from Mr Sham, on the ground that the individuals concerned lacked refugee legal status, and that this bred resentment against him.

18. By further email of 8 July 2026 to the IJF Secretary General, Ms Lisa Allan, sent following a meeting that day with the President of the Syrian Judo Federation, the account continues that the Federation President acknowledged that a serious error had taken place but stated that he would stand by Mr Sham regardless of the facts. The same email contains the passage on which the charge principally rests, in which the author states that, in a moment of profound frustration and as a symbolic protest against the disrespect shown towards the authors and the IJF, he felt compelled to burn his judogi in front of the Federation's premises, emphasising that the gesture expressed rejection of the officials' conduct and was in no way a reflection of any lack of respect for the sport of judo itself. The email is signed "Sanda Aldass / Fadi Darwish" and sent from Ms Aldass's account; the Respondent has at all times accepted authorship of the admission and confirmed the act as his own in the Defence.
19. The burning of the judogi is admitted. According to the Defence, the act took place at night outside the Federation headquarters — according to the supplementary statement, on the public street beyond the closed main gate, between 10:00 and 10:30 p.m., and without damage to the Federation's property — in the presence of no person other than the Vice President of the Federation and, per the supplementary statement, the National Team Coach, and the garment burned was the Respondent's personal training gi bearing no official IJF logo (Exhibit 1). The Respondent states that he photographed the act and voluntarily disclosed it to the IJF Secretary General himself, attaching the screenshot to his first email following the event (Exhibit 2), and has since referred the Commission to video documentation of the act.
20. The Respondent published at least one social media post concerning the incident. He states that an initial post was deleted under duress following threats against his family's safety, and that he subsequently published a public statement attaching the IJF endorsement letter and tagging the official IJF account (Annex 2; Exhibit 2). The Facebook post in evidence, published in Arabic with an English rendering, states in substance that the Respondent did not burn his judogi because he had lost his sense of belonging to the sport, but because he refused to lose his dignity; that he burned it after realising that years of giving and achievements were being treated as if they meant nothing; that in judo everything begins with respect; and that the burning was "a painful message of protest — not against the Judo I loved and lived for, but against a reality that denied its values."
21. On 14 July 2026, Ms Aldass and the Respondent submitted a complaint to the IJF Integrity Unit alleging verbal abuse, nepotism and irregularities in nominations for an IJF Academy course, and possible financial misconduct within the Syrian Judo Federation (Annex 3). On 24 July 2026, the Integrity Unit responded that the matters fell within the internal governance of the Syrian Judo Federation and outside its direct jurisdiction, noted that the financial allegations were already under investigation by the competent Syrian authorities, and closed the file (Annex 4). On the same day the complainants sought reconsideration, contending that insults directed at the IJF and its President fall within the exclusive jurisdiction of the IJF and that no impartial internal remedy exists at national level (Annex 5). On 11 August 2026, the Integrity Unit requested documentary evidence of exhaustion of internal channels, and on 13 August 2026 the complainants submitted a further statement asserting the structural absence of functional internal complaint mechanisms in Syria, referring to chat and audio evidence and identifying three officials of the Syrian Judo Federation as eye-witnesses whose confidentiality they requested be protected (Annex 6).

22. The reasoned request of the IJF President followed, and the present proceedings were initiated on 17 August 2026 as set out in Section I above. Following the Notice of Charge, the Respondent states that he contacted senior officials of the Syrian Judo Federation seeking witness testimony; the outreach messages and the responses received are in evidence (Exhibit 5) and are summarised at Section V below.

IV. THE ELEMENTS OF THE DEFENCE

23. The Respondent does not dispute the material act. His Defence accepts that he deliberately burned his judogi outside the premises of the Syrian Judo Federation and addresses instead the context, characterisation and consequences of that act. Its principal elements may be summarised as follows.
24. First, character and record. The Respondent relies on a lifelong dedication to judo, his coaching credentials, his self-funded support of refugee athletes, his three years of service to the IJF-managed Refugee Olympic Team project, the family sacrifices this entailed, and an unblemished disciplinary record. He reiterates unreserved respect and loyalty towards the IJF, its President and the values of the sport.
25. Second, provocation and context. The Respondent contends that the act was a reactive, emotional response to severe provocation: sustained intimidation and vile insults directed by Mr Sham not only at him personally but at the IJF, its Presidency and the President's letter of endorsement, which the Respondent describes as "an absolute red line." He describes the psychological toll on himself and his family, his decision to evacuate his family to the Netherlands four days after the incident out of fear of retaliation, and a local climate of intimidation in which a potential witness withdrew for fear of persecution.
26. Third, the private character of the act. The Respondent emphasises that the burning took place at night, outside the Federation premises, in the presence of no one except the Federation's Vice President; that the garment was his personal training gi bearing no IJF logo; and that the act was accordingly "a private emotional cry rather than a public stunt against international symbols." He states that his first public post was deleted under duress following threats, and that his later public statement was made to counter denial of the events by local officials.
27. In his supplementary statement, the Respondent gives a more detailed chronology and refers to further evidence of the circumstances of the act. He states that the meeting inside the Federation premises during which the verbal abuse occurred began at 6:30 p.m., coinciding with the men's national team training session, and concluded between 7:30 and 8:00 p.m.; that following that session the Vice President of the Federation and the National Team Coach remained with him to address directly the escalation caused by the earlier abuse; and that, those violations remaining unaddressed, his intense emotional distress culminated in the burning of the judogi on the public street outside the premises between 10:00 and 10:30 p.m., in the direct presence of both officials. He refers the Commission to the video documentation identified at Section I above, submitting that: from 00:43 the footage shows that the act took place entirely outside, on the public sidewalk beyond the closed main gate, and caused no damage to the Federation's property; at 00:59 the white car of the Vice President of the Federation is visible with its door open at the scene, confirming that official's direct physical presence; and the

audio statement at the end of the recording (from 00:55) — in working translation, “The place where you do not find your respect, and where respect has been lost... stay away from it. Fadi Darwish” — confirms that the act was a direct emotional reaction to the mistreatment and loss of respect experienced during the meeting, and not a premeditated or malicious act.

28. Fourth, transparency and good faith. The Respondent relies on his voluntary self-disclosure of the act to the IJF Secretary General in his first email after the event, with a photograph attached, as demonstrating the absence of any intention to disrespect the IJF or to act covertly.
29. Fifth, the conduct and omissions of the Syrian Judo Federation. The Respondent relies on: the draft “clarification statement” transmitted by the Federation’s Secretary General, which refers to resolving “previous disputes” between Mr Sham and the Respondent, as a written acknowledgement that an incident occurred (Exhibit 3); a sympathetic voice message from a member of the Syrian Olympic Commission acknowledging the situation and his inability to intervene (Exhibit 4); and WhatsApp correspondence with the Secretary General said to demonstrate acknowledgement of the incident, an admission that no official investigation was opened upon the Federation learning of it — which the Respondent characterises as a breach of Article 3.2 of the Code — and subsequent contradiction and attempted cover-up (Exhibit 5). He further relies on the non-responsiveness of Federation officials to his requests for testimony, and asks the Commission to treat any subsequent retaliatory submissions from the national federation as bad-faith measures. He states that he remains prepared to cooperate regarding witness testimony under oath or solemn affirmation.
30. Sixth, legal submissions in mitigation. The Respondent submits that: (a) actions stemming from severe psychological distress and proven provocation constitute a decisive mitigating factor in international sports jurisprudence; (b) focusing on his emotional reaction while disregarding the underlying abuse would be inconsistent with the principles of the IJF safeguarding framework; and (c) a severe sanction for a symbolic, private act born of distress, imposed on a person with a clean record, would violate the principle of proportionality under Swiss¹ law and international sports law.
31. The relief requested is that the Commission take full account of his record, sacrifices, the provocation and the local climate of intimidation; reclassify the act as a private, symbolic, emotional protest against local bullying rather than public disrespect towards the sport; and conclude the proceedings with a formal warning or reprimand, directing scrutiny towards the alleged primary misconduct of the local officials.

V. SUMMARY AND WORKING TRANSLATION OF THE ARABIC-LANGUAGE EVIDENCE

32. The following unofficial working translations and summaries of the Arabic-language material in the file are provided for the convenience of the Commission. They do not replace certified translations under Article 17 of the Code.
33. Annex 2 (Facebook publication by the Respondent). The post is bilingual; the Arabic text corresponds in substance to the English rendering included in the post itself. In summary, the

¹ It must be noted that The IJF is no longer registered under Swiss Law since the 17th January 2029. It is now registered in Hungary.

Respondent writes that he did not burn his judogi because he lost his sense of belonging to the sport, but because he refused to lose his dignity; that he burned it after realising that years of giving and achievements — local, Asian, global and Olympic — no longer received the respect they deserved; that in judo everything begins with respect, which is a philosophy and moral code transcending winning and losing; that the burning was a painful message of protest against a reality that denied judo's values, not against the sport he loved; and that achievements cannot be erased by marginalisation. He concludes that what burned with the gi was “the trust, loyalty, and respect upon which this sport is built.”

34. Exhibit 3 (message from Mr Mohammad Boulad, Secretary General of the Syrian Judo Federation). The screenshot shows a draft public statement in Arabic headed, in translation, “Clarifying statement: reunion of the Syrian judo family.” In summary, the draft announces that, in the framework of strengthening unity and cooperation within the Syrian judo family, a friendly meeting was held between the board of the Syrian Arab Judo Federation and “the two champions Mouhanad Sham and Fadi Darwish,” during which “the page was turned on the previous disputes that recently occurred between board member Mr Mouhanad Sham and the champion and former national team coach Mr Fadi Darwish.” The draft continues in a conciliatory register, praising both men — describing the Respondent as having given more than 28 years of honourable service with local, Arab and international achievements — without describing the nature of the disputes, apportioning responsibility or announcing any investigation. The Respondent relies on this draft as an acknowledgement that an incident occurred and states that he rejected it as disrespectful and as minimising the abuse.
35. Exhibit 4 (exchange with Mr Omar Derbas, Syrian Olympic Commission). The Respondent's message states, in translation: “Of course, Mr Omar, I published this on my Facebook page, and I hope my voice reaches you, the rest of the sports leadership, and especially the Minister.” There follows an automatic transcript of a 55-second voice note from Mr Derbas which, allowing for gaps in the transcription, reads in substance: “Greetings, my brother Fadi, may God grant you health. I sincerely apologise — as I told you, I am travelling in Lebanon and these two days I have been taken up with meetings and short engagements in which I have been trying to catch up. ... Believe me, I feel the sadness; it should not be like this, such things should not happen, but ... such situations can be resolved ... the Federation ... judo must come first in Syria, but there are problems like this at this time, unfortunately. ... God willing, perhaps at the weekend we can sit together at the Ministry, talk, and get to know you — it would be an honour.” The message conveys sympathy and an implicit acknowledgement of a problem within the Federation, together with a proposal to meet, but no commitment to formal intervention.
36. Exhibit 5, pages 1 and 3 (WhatsApp exchange with Mr Boulad). In a formal Arabic message the Respondent thanks Mr Boulad for his “written reply, which constitutes an official acknowledgement and documentation, from the Federation's Secretariat, of your institutional and certain knowledge of the incident and the violations committed by Mr Mouhanad Sham,” and continues that the verbal and direct notifications given in the meeting attended by Mr Boulad and the Federation President “were official and complete,” but that the Federation President's declared intention to deny the matter at board level rendered the local complaint route “a formality with a predetermined outcome,” noting that Article 3.2 of the IJF Disciplinary Code obliges the local federation to open disciplinary proceedings of its own motion upon learning of an incident, without requiring a written complaint, particularly where the conduct included express public insult to the dignity of the IJF. Mr Boulad's reply states,

in translation: “To clarify: as regards what took place between you and board member Mr Mouhanad Sham, we were contacted about it verbally, the matter was addressed and an attempt was made to resolve the dispute and close it amicably; at the time, no formal complaint or official request to investigate the incident was received by the Federation. If you consider the matter still outstanding and wish to pursue it formally, we confirm the Federation’s readiness to receive any formal complaint from you, to study it, verify its particulars and take the necessary measures in accordance with the rules.” The Respondent’s closing message states that “the competent sovereign authority has established all the violations and the evidence,” and that he would end the discussion there.

37. Exhibit 5, pages 2, 4 and 8 (witness outreach). The Respondent sent a substantially identical Arabic message to Mr Yasser Bayadoun (national team head coach), Mr Mohi Al-Din Al-Rahim (identified as national team coach) and Mr Mohamad Ali Al-Saleh (Vice President of the Federation), reading in translation: “Further to the request of the Disciplinary Commission of the International Judo Federation (IJF) to establish the truth of the incident that occurred to me in Syria, and the abuse, involving Mr Mouhanad Sham, board member of the Syrian Judo Federation, I wish to ask you personally whether you would be prepared to provide your written testimony to the Commission about what happened. Should you prefer not to testify, in view of the circumstances or out of fear for your personal and family safety, we and the IJF fully understand and respect your decision, and will not hold you to anything if it would lead to problems for you, whether within your work with the Syrian Judo Federation or outside it, by way of intimidation or difficulties. — Fadi Darwish.” The visible responses are limited: Mr Bayadoun reacted with a “thumbs-up” and, when pressed (“Brother Yasser, will you testify or not?” — “In writing, please, brother Yasser”), replied “aye/yes” without a written statement appearing in the file; an earlier message from Mr Al-Saleh reads, in substance, “The truth is with you — with your brother you will remain well; peace be upon you,” which is supportive in tone but non-committal. No written witness statement from any Syrian Judo Federation official appears in the file.
38. Exhibit 2 (disclosure correspondence). The screenshots of the Respondent’s email to Ms Allan are in English (with the sending device displaying Arabic interface elements only) and correspond to the email of 8 July 2026 quoted at paragraph 18 above, with the admission passage highlighted.

VI. JURISDICTION, APPLICABLE RULES AND PROCEDURE

39. Pursuant to Articles 1.1 and 1.2 of the Code, the Code applies to disciplinary and ethical offences committed by, among others, athletes and persons involved in judo in accordance with the Statutes, regulations and decisions of the IJF. The Respondent is a judoka and coach, a long-standing participant in IJF activities — including the IJF-managed Refugee Olympic Team project — and a person connected with the activities of the Syrian Judo Federation. He falls within the personal scope of the Code, and has not contested jurisdiction; on the contrary, his Defence engages with the merits and invokes provisions of the Code in his favour. Under Article 1.3 the IJF disciplinary bodies have the power to investigate any fact or incident contrary to the moral code of judo, the principle of reciprocity, the Statutes and the Code and Regulations of the IJF. The proceedings were validly initiated under Articles 16.1 and 16.2(b),

and the Respondent was afforded the procedural rights guaranteed by Articles 15.2 to 15.6, including notice of the subject matter and legal basis of the charge, time to prepare, and the opportunity to submit evidence, motions and comments, of which he availed himself by filing the Defence and exhibits. Originally, the Respondent requested an online live hearing. He subsequently withdrew this request and acquiesced to proceedings by written submissions.

40. The standard to which the Commission makes its findings is its comfortable satisfaction on the evidence before it, bearing in mind the seriousness of the allegation, the Respondent bearing no burden to prove his innocence (Article 15.2(g) and the procedural warning under Article 26.4).

VII. FINDINGS OF FACT

41. The following facts are established to the Commission's comfortable satisfaction, resting as they do on the Respondent's own admissions, which have been consistent from his first disclosure of 8 July 2026 through the Defence, and on the documentary record: (a) on or about 8 July 2026, following a dispute with officials of the Syrian Judo Federation and a meeting with its President, the Respondent deliberately set fire to a judogi outside the premises of the Syrian Judo Federation; (b) the act was intentional and symbolic, intended to express protest at what the Respondent regarded as disrespect shown to himself, his wife and the IJF; (c) the garment was the Respondent's personal training gi and bore no IJF logo (Exhibit 1); (d) the act took place at night, on the public street outside the closed main gate of the premises and without damage to the Federation's property and, on the unrebutted account of the Respondent as refined in his supplementary statement, in the presence of no persons other than the Vice President of the Federation and the National Team Coach; (e) the Respondent photographed the act and disclosed it, on his own initiative and without concealment, in his first communication to the IJF Secretary General following the event (Exhibit 2), and subsequently referred the Commission to video documentation of the act; and (f) the Respondent subsequently referred to the act publicly on social media, in a post framing it as a protest in defence of his dignity and expressly not directed against the sport of judo (Annex 2).
42. As to the surrounding circumstances, the Commission finds — without determining the precise content of the exchanges or the culpability of any official of the Syrian Judo Federation, which are matters reserved to other procedures — that a genuine and serious incident occurred between the Respondent and Mr Mouhanad Sham at the Federation's premises on or about 7 July 2026, and that the Respondent acted in its aftermath under real and severe distress. That much is corroborated independently of the Respondent's account: the Federation's own Secretary General drafted a public statement referring to "previous disputes that recently occurred" between Mr Sham and the Respondent (Exhibit 3); his written reply acknowledges that the Federation was made aware of the matter verbally and sought to resolve it "amicably" (Exhibit 5); and a member of the Syrian Olympic Committee responded with sympathy and the acknowledgement that "it should not be like this" (Exhibit 4). The Respondent's evacuation of his family to the Netherlands four days after the incident is consistent with his account of fear and distress.

43. The Commission makes no finding as to the truth of the specific allegations of verbal abuse, insult to the IJF, nepotism or financial misconduct levelled against Mr Sham or the Syrian Judo Federation. Those allegations are not the subject of these proceedings and remain to be assessed, if at all, through the appropriate IJF mechanisms. For the purposes of assessing the Respondent's culpability and any sanction, however, the Commission proceeds on the footing — favourable to the Respondent and amply supported by the corroborating material identified above — that he genuinely and reasonably believed himself and the IJF to have been gravely disrespected, and that he perceived no functioning local avenue of redress.
44. The Commission accepts the Respondent's un rebutted account that his first social media post was deleted following threats, and notes that the later public statement was made after, on his account, the Federation declined to issue what he regarded as a respectful clarification. It is unnecessary to make further findings in this respect.

VIII. LEGAL ASSESSMENT

A. Whether a disciplinary offence is established

45. Under Article 3.1 of the Code, a disciplinary offence is committed by anyone who culpably breaches an obligation under the IJF Statutes, the IJF Rules or Regulations, or the applicable standards of conduct. The relevant standards here are those of the IJF Code of Ethics, which require judoka to exercise self-control and remain disciplined in all circumstances, to refrain from abusing equipment, and to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with their role as representatives of judo, read with Articles 1.4 and 1.6 of the Code.
46. The objective elements are made out. The judogi is the principal uniform of the judoka and carries, within the culture and pedagogy of judo, a symbolic weight that transcends its character as personal property: it embodies the discipline, respect and self-mastery that the sport exists to teach. Its deliberate destruction by fire, carried out in front of the premises of a national judo federation as an act of protest arising from a dispute within judo, is conduct falling squarely within the standards invoked: it is, on its face, a failure to “remain disciplined in all circumstances” and a deliberate destruction of judo equipment. The Respondent himself, in his public statement, described what burned with the gi as “the trust, loyalty, and respect upon which this sport is built” — a description which, whatever its rhetorical intent, captures precisely why the act engages the ethical framework of the sport.
47. The subjective element — culpability — is likewise established. The act was deliberate, considered in its symbolism, and directed at a judo institution. It was not accidental, nor the product of a loss of capacity; the Respondent's own account is of a purposive, communicative act.
48. The Commission has carefully considered the three features on which the Defence relies to take the conduct outside the Code altogether: that the gi was the Respondent's personal property; that it bore no IJF logo; and that the act occurred at night, essentially in private. These features are real and significantly reduce the gravity of the conduct, and they weigh heavily at the stage of sanction. They do not, however, negate the breach. The ethical obligation of self-control is not confined to public settings or to competition; the symbolic character of the judogi does not depend on a federation logo; and the act was not, in truth, wholly private — it was performed in front of the Federation's premises, witnessed by the Federation's Vice President

and the National Team Coach, photographed by the Respondent, communicated to the IJF, and later referred to publicly by the Respondent himself. An act designed to communicate protest cannot at the same time be characterised as devoid of outward effect.

49. The Commission accordingly finds that the Respondent committed a disciplinary offence under Article 3.1 of the Code, read with Articles 1.4 and 1.6 and the IJF Code of Ethics. For the reasons developed below, however, the offence lies at the lowest end of the scale of gravity.

B. Freedom of expression

50. The Commission has asked itself whether, and to what extent, the Respondent's freedom of expression bears on these proceedings. It does, and the point merits express treatment even though the Defence advances it in substance (through its reliance on the act's character as protest, on safeguarding principles and on proportionality) rather than in name.
51. The burning of the gi was expressive conduct: a symbolic act intended to communicate protest on matters of legitimate concern within the governance of the sport — alleged abusive treatment of athletes and alleged disrespect towards the international federation. Under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights as reflected in international sports jurisprudence, members of a sporting association do not surrender their freedom of expression at the door of the dojo. Freedom of expression extends to nonverbal symbolic acts. A sports governing body may nonetheless subject expression to proportionate restrictions in pursuit of legitimate aims, among which the protection of the ethical foundations, symbols and educational values of the sport plainly ranks.
52. Three consequences follow for the present case. First, the existence of an expressive purpose does not immunise the conduct from disciplinary assessment: what is sanctioned here is not the content of the Respondent's protest — his criticisms, his complaint, his public statements — but the chosen form of the protest, namely the destruction by fire of the very object that embodies the values of the sport. A restriction confined to the form of expression, leaving open ample alternative channels (which the Respondent in fact used: correspondence with the Secretary General and President, the Integrity Unit complaint, his written statements), is a narrow and aim-specific restriction.
53. Second, and conversely, the expressive character of the act, its connection to whistleblowing on matters of governance, and the context of genuine distress substantially constrain the severity of any sanction. Expression on matters of concern within the sport attracts heightened protection, and a severe sanction imposed on an athlete who raised complaints of abuse — however inappropriate the accompanying gesture — would risk both a disproportionate interference with expression and a chilling effect on the willingness of athletes to report misconduct, contrary to the safeguarding objectives of the IJF itself. The Commission is also mindful that these proceedings must not be, and must not appear to be, a response to the Respondent's complaint: they were expressly confined to the burning of the gi, and this decision maintains that strict separation.
54. Third, the balance is properly struck not by acquittal — which would signal that the deliberate destruction of judo's central symbol is an acceptable mode of protest — nor by any severe sanction — which would be a disproportionate response to a private, distress-driven, immediately self-disclosed act — but by a finding of breach accompanied by the mildest

measure available under the Code. In this way the ethical standard is affirmed while the Respondent's freedom to voice his grievances, then and in the future, is left wholly intact.

IX. SANCTION AND PROPORTIONALITY

55. In determining the appropriate disciplinary consequence, the Commission has weighed the following mitigating circumstances, which it finds to be of exceptional cumulative weight: (a) the Respondent acted under severe provocation as he genuinely perceived it, in the immediate aftermath of a serious incident the occurrence of which is corroborated by the Federation's own documents, and in a state of real distress; (b) the act was performed at night, on the public street outside the closed gate of the premises, before no one but two Federation officials, without damage to any property, upon his personal training gi bearing no IJF insignia — the manner least injurious to the public image of the sport that such an act could take; (c) the Respondent disclosed the act to the IJF voluntarily, immediately and completely, attaching the photographic evidence himself — conduct wholly inconsistent with bad faith and itself the sole source of the evidence founding this charge; (d) he has cooperated with the proceedings, engaged respectfully with the Commission, and offered further cooperation on testimony under oath; (e) he has an unblemished disciplinary record across a career of nearly three decades; (f) his record of service to the sport — including his self-funded support of refugee athletes and his years of contribution to the IJF-managed Refugee Olympic Team project, recognised by the IJF President's own letter of recommendation — attests that the act was an aberration in a life defined by devotion to judo; (g) he perceived, not without foundation on the material before the Commission, that no effective local avenue of redress existed; and (h) his contemporaneous and subsequent statements consistently affirmed, rather than repudiated, his respect for the sport and the IJF.
56. Against this the Commission weighs the deliberate and considered character of the act and its later public airing. The publication, however, cuts in both directions: it extended the act's visibility, but it was itself measured in content, expressly disclaimed any disrespect towards judo, and responded, on the Respondent's un rebutted account, to local denial of the underlying events. The Commission does not treat it as a significant aggravating factor, and recalls that the Notice of Charge advanced the social media material as context and evidence only, not as a separate charge.
57. Balancing the foregoing, the Commission concludes that the purposes of the disciplinary framework — the affirmation of judo's ethical standards and the education of those who practise the sport — are fully served by the imposition of a reprimand, the mildest substantive sanction available under the Code, without any fine, suspension or other measure.
58. The Commission emphasises, finally, that nothing in this decision determines, diminishes or forecloses the complaint submitted by Ms Aldass and the Respondent. The seriousness with which the Respondent's own minor transgression has been examined in these proceedings should find its counterpart in the treatment, under the appropriate IJF mechanisms, of the allegations he has raised.

X. OPERATIVE PART

59. For the reasons set out above, the IJF Disciplinary Commission decides as follows:

1. Mr Fadi Darwish committed a disciplinary offence under Article 3.1 of the IJF Disciplinary Code, read together with Articles 1.4 and 1.6 of the Code and the IJF Code of Ethics, by deliberately burning his judogi in front of the premises of the Syrian Judo Federation on or about 8 July 2026.
2. Mr Fadi Darwish is sanctioned with a reprimand. No fine, suspension or other disciplinary measure is imposed.
3. The present decision is confined to the conduct described in point 1. It neither determines nor prejudices the allegations submitted by Ms Sanda Aldass and Mr Fadi Darwish against the Syrian Judo Federation and its officials, which remain to be considered under the appropriate IJF procedures.
4. This decision shall be notified to Mr Fadi Darwish and to the IJF President through the IJF General Secretariat.

The Defendant is informed that this decision is subject to appeal to the IJF Disciplinary Appeal Commission.

The time limit for appeal shall be fifteen days from the receipt of the decision appealed against.

16th September 2026



Richard Galea Debono

President

For the IJF Disciplinary Commission