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IAAF STRONGLY SUPPORTS 50 KM RACE WALK COMPETITION

The Council of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) today unanimously endorsed keeping the 50 km race walk competition as part of the Olympics and the World Championships. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) had pressured the athletics governing body to drop the event starting with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

American lawyer Paul F. DeMeester, in London at the IAAF Council meeting site to support the 50 km race walk, applauded the IAAF decision: “The IAAF support for the 50 km fully comports with the objectives of the IAAF Constitution, among which are the promotion of athletics¹ world-wide, the encouragement of participation, and the striving for gender equality.² The IOC wants to do away with the 50 km race walk in large measure because women walkers do not have a 50 km Olympic event.

When it comes to the inclusion of women athletes, the IAAF has been miles ahead of the IOC. At last year's World Race Walking Team Championships, the IAAF included women walkers in the 50 km race. Also, the IAAF recognizes world records for women at that distance; and further allows women walkers to participate in the upcoming 50 km race walk event at the London World Championships on August 13.

In sharp contrast to the inclusive actions by the IAAF, the IOC has had a lengthy history of discriminating against women athletes. Excluded altogether from participating in the Olympics until 1928, they were limited to running distances of 800 meters or less until 1972 but had to wait another 12 years for a women's marathon (Los Angeles 1984). Women race walkers only debuted at Barcelona (1992), women pole vaulters at Sydney (2000) and women steeple runners at Beijing (2008).

Now the IOC wants to compound their sorry gender inequality history by abolishing the men's 50 km race walk because not having it for women at the Olympics violates principles of gender neutrality. DeMeester compared the IOC's attitude to the right to vote: “Nations did not take men's rights to vote away because women were not allowed to vote. No, instead, the franchise was extended to women.” Similarly, the IOC did not insist on abolishing the men's pole vault because women were excluded from the event before 2000. No, instead, the event was opened up to both men and women.

Gender equality means that both men and women compete the 50 km race walk. Expanding the 50 km race walk to include women is in accord with the IAAF Constitution, which provides that the IAAF “Congress alone shall have the right to decide upon the introduction of new competitions directly organised by the IAAF, i.e., World Championships and World Cups.”³

1 Referred to as “track and field” in the United States.

2 See IAAF 2017 Const. (eff. Jan. 1, 2017), Art. 4, secs. 2, 3, 4, and 10.

3 See IAAF Const., *supra*, Art. 6, sec. 6.

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DeMeester, a trial and appellate lawyer from San Francisco, noted that the “IAAF Constitution nowhere mentions deleting or dropping events but only talks about adding them.” DeMeester urged Olympic officials to follow the IAAF's lead and include women walkers in the 50 km race walk at Tokyo.

The Californian further requested that the IAAF Race Walk Committee develop a suitable women's 50 km qualifying standard for use at the upcoming London Worlds. Currently, women would have to reach the same standard as that for men (4:06:00). None have done so thus far although Ines Henriques of Portugal came close on January 15, 2017 when she walked 50 km in 4:08:26.

If women were held to the same qualifying standards as men, no women runners would earn an entry to this year's world championships in any of the non-hurdle running events (different hurdle and steeple barrier heights render time comparisons less useful). Only four women marathon runners would have made the cut but none are active anymore now. The numbers prove the point, with the number of qualifying women representing the number of women who could meet the men's entry standard in the non-hurdle running events:

<u>Event</u>	<u>Men's Standard</u>	<u>Women's Standard</u>	<u>Difference</u>	<u>Women's Best</u>	<u>No. of Qualifying Women</u>
100m	10.12	11.26	+11.26 %	10.49	ZERO
200m	20.44	23.10	+13.01 %	21.34	ZERO
400m	45.50	52.10	+14.50 %	47.60	ZERO
800m	1:45.90	2:01.00	+14.26 %	1:53.28	ZERO
1500m	3:36.00	4:07.50	+14.58 %	3:50.07	ZERO
5000m	13:22.60	15:22.00	+14.88 %	14:11.15	ZERO
10000m	27:45.00	32:15.00	+16.22 %	29:17.45	ZERO
Marathon	2:19:00	2:45:00	+18.70 %	2:15:25	4 but all in the past

For the 20 km race walk, the men's qualifying standard is 12 minutes below the women's. Extrapolated to 50 km, the difference in standards would be 30 minutes, for a women's standard of 4:36:00. But applying the same percentage difference as that is used for the marathon standards, where the women's standard is 18.7 % greater than the men's, the women's 50 km race walk standard would end up being 4:52:00. Under either standard, two U.S. women walkers, Katie Burnett and Erin Taylor-Talcott, would qualify for London.

DeMeester expressed the hope that the differential standard could be implemented soon. “To have the women's 50 km race walk entry standard be the only one that does not differ from the men's, out of 22 non-relay events, constitutes *de facto* discrimination,” added attorney DeMeester. “We must and can do better than to allow women to compete but then make it impossible for any woman to meet the entry standard,” concluded DeMeester.