



**Press Statement:**

**Gender-based discrimination among women athletes' is harmful and should not be encouraged.**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**28th October, 2024**

The National Organisation for Women in Sport, Physical Activity, and Recreation (NOWSPAR) expresses its deep concern regarding recent media coverage surrounding Zambian footballer Barbra Banda, currently based in United States of America playing for National Women's Soccer League club Orlando Pride. Barbra Banda has been exceptional and nominated for the prestigious Ballon d'Or awards making it the first nomination for Zambia and recently nominated for the BBC Women's Footballer of the Year Award. These are two incredible and prestigious awards recognized globally and should be celebrated. However, it is rather disappointing that instead of celebrating this monumental achievement, some international newspapers and social media especially the one published by Women Rights Network and Daily mail UK have chosen to reignite discussions about harmful gender eligibility debates.

**Athletes' achievements must be celebrated, not tarnished**

Barbra Banda's nomination is a reflection of her hard work, skill, talent, and dedication. Her contributions to football, leadership, and role as a positive role model for young women, especially in Zambia and across the Global South, deserve to be recognised and honoured—not overshadowed by sensationalist and harmful headlines.

The sustained questioning of Barbra's eligibility to participate in the women's category of football is harmful and unfairly distracts from the significance of her nominations. It also perpetuates a pattern where female athletes, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, are held to unfair standards and subjected to unwarranted scrutiny.

**A Call for respectful, responsible media reporting**

The media has a powerful role to play in shaping how athletes are perceived, and with this power comes responsibility. NOWSPAR urges the media to refrain from undermining the

successes of athletes like Barbra Banda by bringing up harmful, personal and controversial topics that undermines their dedication and achievements. Media regulatory and ethics bodies around the world must hold media entities to account for the harm they cause through active publication or neglect to remove abusive content.

NOWSPAR is committed to supporting media practitioners in learning how to report responsibly with inclusivity and sensitivity. Through our engagement that focuses on **sensitivity, fairness, and ethics in sports journalism** we hope that the media houses will prioritise **respectful and sensitive reporting**, especially when dealing with sports topics related to gender and biological differences/characteristics.

### **Policy and Athlete Protection**

The issues that Barbra Banda has faced regarding gender eligibility rules speak to a broader challenge in the sports sector. These policies disproportionately affect women, particularly those from marginalized communities. While the focus should always be on fairness in sports, it is critical that policies are designed and implemented in a way that protects the **dignity and rights of all athletes**.

NOWSPAR remains committed to working with sports governing bodies to create inclusive policies that protect athletes and ensure that they are able to compete based on their skills, talent and commitment, without being subjected to invasive and harmful scrutiny.

### **In Solidarity with Babra Banda**

Barbra Banda is an exceptional athlete who has inspired countless young women. Her nomination for the BBC Women's Footballer of the Year Award is an incredible achievement, and we stand with her in solidarity. We also stand with all athletes who have faced similar challenges, and we will continue to advocate for a sports environment that is **fair, inclusive, and respectful** of all competitors.

NOWSPAR remains available to work with stakeholders in the media, sports, and rights organizations to ensure that athletes are protected from discriminatory practices and harmful reporting.

On behalf of NOWSPAR,

Mofu Kandondo,

**Acting Executive Director**