



INTERNATIONAL VA'A FEDERATION (IVF)
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4 December 2023

Memo

Disciplinary action taken after Samoa IVF World Distance Championship

Dear International Va'a Federation Member,

This memo is to inform Member Federations of the disciplinary action that the IVF has taken regarding the behaviour of some of the members of the Tahitian contingent at the IVF World Distance Championship in Samoa.

The IVF Board has met to discuss the recent incidents at the IVF World Distance Championship and determined that they were, along with all those who attended the event, shocked to observe what unfolded on the last three days of the event, which ultimately resulted in, on Friday August 18, the arrest by Samoan Police of four male junior members of the Tahitian Va'a Federation for the assault of a 15 year old New Zealand paddler. The parents of the victim chose not to press charges, but each of the Tahitian boys were issued warnings from the Samoan Police. If charges had been pressed the boys could have been sentenced with a one-year prison sentence.

The IVF Board can in no way condone or accept any form of violence in our sport or at our events. It is simply unacceptable and in contravention of all we stand for as a sport. It is for this reason that the Board has made the decision to ban the four (4) individuals from the next two (2) IVF World Championships: 2024 World Sprint Championships in Hilo and 2025 World Distance Championships in Brazil.

The IVF Board has determined that the behaviour by some members of the Tahitian contingent, throughout the event, ultimately contributed to this violence. Such contributory behaviours are equally unacceptable. For example, at two medal ceremonies Tahitian junior paddlers were encouraged by coaches and adults to disrespect the ceremonies. Refusing to stand for another country's national anthem, Junior paddlers turning their backs to the ceremony while on the podium and Junior paddlers standing to block another country's cultural practice during a medal ceremony. These actions are an indictment on our sport and the sanctity of competition. These acts were not only disrespectful to all countries present and ultimately disrespected the host nation, Samoa, of whom we were all guests in their country.

The IVF Board has concluded that these events demonstrated a lack of leadership from the Tahitian Va'a Federation and lack of institutional control during these incidents. In fact, sadly, this behaviour was encouraged and permitted to continue which also consequently led to a barrage of social media bullying.

Displeasure with the race rules and the outcome of protests filed by the Tahitian Va'a Federation was offered as an excuse for this behaviour. Let the IVF Board be very clear; no excuse is acceptable for the incidents that occurred at the Event. The race rules are long-standing and explicit. The particular rule that was at issue during the two races involving Tahiti protests have been unchanged since 2017. Every country has had the opportunity to suggest changes and engage in the race rule processes annually. Regardless of any individual's or Federation's displeasure with rules, outcomes of protests or race results, this can never excuse or lead to bullying, unsporting behaviour, disrespect for people or their culture and, most certainly any violence.

Along with the sanctions on the 4 paddlers arrested, the IVF Board require that the Tahitian Va'a Federation write a letter of apology to the Samoa Outrigger Canoe Association for the disrespectful acts toward them as our event hosts. In addition, a letter of apology will be required to be issued to the New Zealand Federation for disrespecting their cultural practices and for the violence that left one Junior boy assaulted and his family impacted. These letters must be sent before any entries can be made by Tahiti into the next IVF World Championship.

Over the coming months the IVF will be enacting a code of conduct, which will clearly document expectations that might have otherwise been viewed as obvious. All member countries will be required to certify in writing that they, along with all of their individual participants, will comply with all terms of the code of conduct prior to entrance in any IVF competition. The code of conduct will include a disciplinary process so that all members are fully aware of the consequences should there be a violation of the code of conduct.

We look forward to all Federations having input into this code of conduct.

Finally, we should all remember that Va'a is more than sport; it is more than medals and winning and losing. It is a way of life, it is a culture deeply rooted in the Pacific and it is nothing without respect for each other and respect for the values we all hold so dear to us. We each are custodians of this sport and have a duty to uphold its values even when an outcome is not to our preference.

If any Member Federation has any questions, please do not hesitate to make contact with us.

Sincerely,
The IVF Board of Directors

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