



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on February 23, 2022

Former NBA Player Receives Human Rights Award for Calling Out NBA and IOC

Enes Kanter Freedom, a Swiss-born Turkish-American professional basketball player, [received the “2022 Courage Award”](#) from the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy (GSHRD) on Tuesday. The award came a week after he had been released by the Houston Rockets.

Freedom was pleased to receive the award and not surprised at the sudden ending of his successful 11-year professional basketball career. His pointed criticism of the NBA over its selling out to China, as well as his sharp disagreement with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for the same reason, all but guaranteed his departure from professional basketball.

He told the GSHRD audience,

I want to say thank you to [the GSHRD] for its support and for shining a global spotlight on human rights abuses in China. I hope this encourages other athletes to stand up for what is right.

Despite China’s propaganda, the regime does not represent the Olympic values of respect and friendship. It’s a brutal dictatorship that oppresses its people.

Freedom has also been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts on shining his own spotlight on those abuses for at least the last 10 years.

As his professional career took him from teams such as the Houston Rockets to the Boston Celtics, he became more and more aware not only of those abuses, but also the complicit and deliberate support being given to China by the NBA in spite of those abuses.

Born in Switzerland in 1992, Enes Kantor (his name given by his Turkish parents) moved back to Turkey. When he became a naturalized U.S. citizen last November, he added “Freedom” to his name.

When Freedom addressed the Committee on Present Danger: China in Washington last week, he called out the NBA:

You can talk about all the social justice, all the injustices happening around the world. But when it comes to China, you cannot speak up.

If you do, then you have to face the consequences.

His move from innocence to awareness began in 2018 while hosting free summer basketball camps. It



AP Images
Enes Kanter Freedom



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was at one of those camps when a mother approached him and challenged him “in front of everybody,” saying “You call yourself a human rights activist, when your Muslim brothers and sisters [the Uyghurs in Western China] are in concentration camps and getting tortured and raped every day.”

“I was shocked,” said Freedom. “I couldn’t say anything.” Then he made a promise to look into the atrocities. What he found changed his life and ultimately ended his professional basketball career: the China Tribunal, an NGO in London looking into forced organ harvesting in China, found that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was committing ghastly crimes of harvesting organs from imprisoned Falun Gong practitioners — an atrocity that had been doing on for more than two decades — and harshly oppressing the minority Uyghur Muslim population in the Xinjiang province.

He began to speak out, quietly at first, using his shoes as billboards for his complaints: “Free Tibet” and “Save Uyghur” among them.

ESPN took note of Freedom’s campaign, televising a documentary on him in 2019 called *Enemy of the State*. A year later he took on Chinese Communist dictator Xi Jinping, calling him “a brutal dictator.” In retaliation the Chinese government stopped streaming all Boston Celtics games.

In November 2021, he was interviewed by Fox News and CNN where he advocated the boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympic Games.

Last week, just before being released by the Houston Rockets, Freedom [was interviewed by The Dispatch](#), a conservative-leaning investigative journal. His host, Danielle Pletka, asked him about any pushback the NBA had been giving him due to the airing of his grievances against it:

I talk about Turkey and the problems are happening in Turkey for 10 years. I did not get one phone call.

I talk about China [and in] one day, my phone was ringing once every hour.

The first game I wore my Free Tibet shoes — I’m sure you guys know the shoes and designs that we come up with — in half time, my manager messaged me and said, “Every Celtics game is banned in China.”

It took them 24 minutes, because one half is 24 minutes, to ban every Celtics game in television over there in China.

I was shocked. I was like, that clearly shows one more time that there’s [a] dictatorship over there.

Pletka asked if money had anything to do with it. Freedom responded:

Yes, that’s the biggest part of it. I mean, I’ll give you an example from the NBA. There are more people watching the NBA last year in China than the American population. Over 400 million.

Every year, the revenue is \$5 billion. I think people can be thinking, “First of all, that’s not my country that I’m going to talk about, and the stuff that I will talk about is not going to change anything. So why would I put myself in a situation like that?”

Why would he? He virtually guaranteed his sudden turning away from the spoon that was feeding him



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millions of dollars every year. He said:

All the gold medals in the world [speaking about the Winter Olympics] that you champion is not more important than your morals, your principles, and your values. It's not worth it. It's not worth selling your morals to a country like China.

I mean, especially when you say an athlete, right? [We] have a huge platform to inspire and affect so much, especially our young generation. Because everything now, social media and everything we do, becomes a conversation. They even follow what we eat, what we wear, what we do and stuff. So, I feel it's a huge responsibility on our shoulders.

Pletka asked him about the Winter Olympics as pure propaganda. Freedom responded:

First off, people need to understand, the IOC, International Olympic Committee, is scared to talk about human rights because they know China is one of the worst in this regard. They will rather take China's [money] than talk about values. The reality is, the people need to understand, the IOC is in bed ... with the Chinese government. They do not care about human rights. They care about publicity and money.

I mean, they just organized [the Olympic] games in a country where there is press brutality, torture, mass arrest, execution, labor camps, religious suppression, and pretty much genocide. Pretty much genocide.

So, I feel like we should definitely call out the IOC because they are part of the problem, and they're helping [the] Chinese government to spread their propaganda.

Does he have any regrets over his activism ending his career? Said Freedom:

I'm just going to go out there and just say it like it is and expose them any way I can.... this is bigger than NBA and basketball. If that is the reason that I am not going to be able to play basketball again, then you know what? Oh, well. I can look back at least and say I did the right thing.



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