

Brazilian Society of Bioethics
Open letter to all participants in the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro 2016.

This letter expresses our concern about the untimely and misguided opinion disclosed by Attaran et al. suggesting that the Olympic Games Rio 2016 should be postponed, transferred or even canceled.

With all due respect to author's good intention, we do not agree with their arguments. Here are the facts:

1. The Zika virus outbreak reached Brazil in 2014 and hit initially the northeastern region of the country, where the first cases of microcephaly associated to Zika were first reported. This infection has as its vector *Aedes aegypti*, the same for dengue and chikungunya, prevalent in Brazil and in several other countries. The Zika virus can also be transmitted by *A. albopictus* (prevalent in the northern hemisphere).

2. The infection is usually mild, and self-limited but if acquired during pregnancy the fetus can be seriously affected. The irreversible harms to the newborn are significant and there is unequivocally an urgent need to establish or implement a social network and financial support for the children and their mothers who must be almost full-time in their care.

3. There is a unequivocal need to attack the main reasons for the wide spread of vectors and to urgently improve the health and social conditions that facilitate these and other emerging and reemerging diseases. There is also the need to increase research in epidemiology and for the development of drugs, vaccines and vector control.

4. The World Health Organization declared the epidemic of Zika as a "Public Health Emergency of international importance (PHEIC)" and the Brazilian Ministry of Health established a specific Protocol to deal with the epidemic, including awareness campaigns and joint efforts with the states and municipalities to control the infestation by *Aedes*.

5. The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) also established recommendations for travelers to areas where there is known transmission of Zika as well as other viruses carried by the same vector.

6. The same risks concerns occurred in relation to dengue epidemic, before the World Cup of 2014, when more than a million tourists came to Brazil. Despite the fact that dengue is more prevalent and can be even more serious, there was no movement for its suspension or postponement, and we found no reported evidence of increased prevalence in other countries associated to the coming of tourists for this event. There were indeed reports of small number of tourists diagnosed, even if we consider the fact that, unlike the Olympics, the World Cup games occurred in all regions of Brazil

Therefore, we consider ungrounded the argument that the Olympics alone will increase the risk of transmission of the Zika virus. It would then be futile to cancel or postpone it because the international air traffic in this globalized world is enormous independent of specific events. If we consider only this air travel, and only through São Paulo-Guarulhos international airport, there were more than 6 million passengers in 2015 (the annual number of passengers in Guarulhos alone reaches 38 million/year). It is worth adding that the airports of Rio de Janeiro and in the Northeast region of Brazil also have a heavy traffic of tourists from all continents, as well as the increasing number of cruise lines reaching daily our extensive coast, regardless of the Olympics. We believe that the risk will be actually mitigated by the natural decrease in the quantity of vectors during the Brazilian winter, and also by the actions to fight the spread of the mosquito, in addition to campaigns to alert on the risks and the dissemination of tools and methods to decrease them.

In conclusion:

1. We don't see at the moment scientific grounds to suspend or postpone the Olympic Games Rio 2016

2. We concur that there is an urgent need for more financial resources and staff, not only to reduce the infestation by *Aedes* and increase research to genetically modified vectors but also and more importantly to invest in basic sanitation across the country, to reinforce the importance of the Brazilian National Health System (SUS) and at the same time avoiding any reduction of social, reproductive and health rights to all.

3. Pregnant women must be informed of the high risk of coming to Brazil for the Olympics and should take all necessary precautions if they decide to come;

4. The use of preventive care in relation to possible sexual transmission of this virus and other viruses must be recommended;

5. Information about risks must be clearly disclosed and any new knowledge be shared immediately;

6. The distribution by SUS (the Brazilian public health system) of repellents to the population should be immediate

7. Women infected during pregnancy must receive all the necessary support (e.g., health, social, financial) for as long as needed and have access to the necessary care for their children.

References:

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- <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/alert/zika-brazil> -CDC recomendações for trip to Brazil
- <http://www.who.int/emergencies/zika-virus/en/> -Zika International Public Health Emergency
- <https://agencia.fiocruz.br/zika-chikungunya-and-dengue-under...> -Summarizes the clinical Description of the three infections

- <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/vector/range.html> - Presence of *A. aegypti* and *albopictus* in the US
- [http://www.thelancet.com/.../lan.../PIIS1473-3099\(15\)00073-0.pdf](http://www.thelancet.com/.../lan.../PIIS1473-3099(15)00073-0.pdf) -Dengue transmission during the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil, Aguiar, M et al.-Lancet 2015.