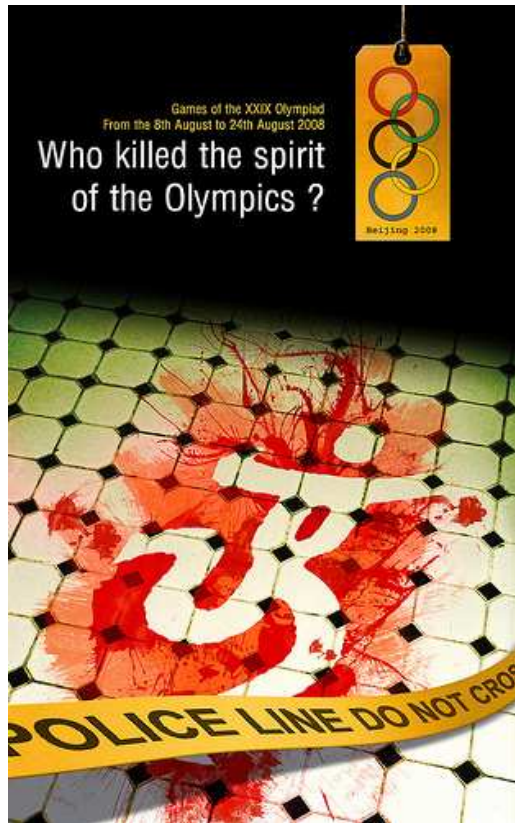


One World, One Dream

By Paul Gibson



We are officially 17 days away to the inauguration of the 29th edition of the Olympic Games. After months and months of expectation, and more than a dozen altercations involving the Olympic torch, the 2008 Olympic Games will be under way in no time.

So what exactly goes into planning the Olympics? First off, just like any sports event, the games require sponsors with lots and lots of money to spend on marketing and promotion. Most sports events are actually a major business forum, where sponsors receive exposure for their products and services through television adverts and official messages or press releases. How much money do you need to raise? That depends on how much you are trying to impress the visitors. Take Beijing for instance, they have already spent just

under 500 million dollars (approximately €315 million EUR) just to build the stadium where the inauguration will take place. That is just one of the six stadiums under construction.

Once you have the sponsors, it is time to look for a host for the games / sports event. This is normally a city or country that is willing to organise the travel itineraries and provide the necessary safety and security measures, logistics and transportation networks necessary to ensure a healthy atmosphere for all those attending the games.

The other side of the Olympic coin, however, has less to do with sports and more to do with politics and business. At the beginning, when Beijing was chosen to host the 2008 games, local politicians and rivals of the existing communist regime took advantage of the situation to reclaim the rights of Chinese citizens. Other interest groups as well condemned the continued abuse towards women and children and the prohibition of freedom of speech. They even organised a massive boycott at a global level. Soon, shouts of 'Free Tibet' and 'Boycot the Olympics' were heard around the world – and all of this, mind you, because China was chosen to host the Olympic Games. Which makes you think, why are people all of a sudden aware of or outraged at the existence of such abuses of freedom and violence? Some think it is because now there are commercial interests involved and that brings a lot of companies sponsoring the Olympics to try and embellish the image of China, inviting Westerners and foreigners alike to see a kind of "democratic" side to China that simply does not exist.

What seems hypocritical (but not surprising) is that most countries who originally supported a kind of boycott against the Olympics seemed to have taken an about face, and changed their tune. Now that the Olympics are just days away, all local and national media talks about how

their Olympic hopefuls will perform at the games. Once again, the actual athletes who have put all their sweat and tears into qualifying for perhaps, the biggest sports competition of their lives, seem to take protagonism and put a stop to the protests.

While countries like China and a number of countries in Africa continue to suffer the consequences of oppressive and abusive military regimes, the business world seems to remain indifferent and take advantage of the games to make a profit, albeit at the cost of unmasking the real injustices that occur in a country where women are persecuted, the air polluted, and children screaming for their lost rights with voices that will never be heard by the vast majority. What an unfortunate way to celebrate years and years of athletic excellence and strength, just to make a dime. The Greeks would be rolling in their graves.