



Washington justifies the exclusion of Somali referee and Iranian officials ahead of the World Cup

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World Cup

Andrew Giuliani, head of the [White House](#) team tasked with organising the 2026 World Cup, defended the US authorities's decision to bar Somali referee Omar Abdulkadir Artan and a number of administrative officials from the Iranian national team from entering the United States, stressing that these measures were taken for "very valid reasons", [according to AFP](#), reporting on a seminar organised by the Atlantic Council think tank in Washington.

The comments come at a time of growing questions regarding the security measures taken by the US in the days leading up to the start of the tournament, which it is co-hosting with Canada and Mexico, particularly following the barring of Artan from entering the country despite holding a valid visa, and the refusal to grant visas to a number of officials accompanying the Iranian national team.

Why did the US bar the Somali referee from the World Cup?

Giuliani has reignited the controversy surrounding the case of Somali referee Omar Abdulkadir Artan, after he was detained at Miami airport for several hours before being returned to Turkey, thereby preventing him from officiating at World Cup matches.

[The US official](#) refused to disclose the specific reasons that led the authorities to take the decision, but he stressed that the ban was not a random measure.

He said:

There was a referee who was not allowed to enter. I cannot go into details, but what I can say is that it was for a very good reason.

He added that US authorities are balancing the hosting of a global event open to the public and sporting delegations with the need to uphold national security requirements.

He explained:

We are trying to strike a balance between welcoming everyone and ensuring that any malicious actors attempting to enter the country under the guise of the World Cup are unable to reach the United States.

Artan, who was named African Referee of the Year for 2025 and has officiated matches in major continental and international tournaments, was set to make his World Cup debut before being barred from entering the US.

Iranian officials deny entry to the US

On the Iranian front, Giuliani confirmed that all members of the national team's coaching staff had been granted entry to the United States, whilst a number of administrative officials had been denied visas.

He said:

All members of the Iranian national team's technical staff are allowed to enter. There are Iranian officials who cannot enter, and that is also for very valid reasons.

He noted that some people might identify themselves as part of sporting or technical delegations, whilst having links to other entities, adding:

As you can imagine, there are people who claim to be coaches, but they may not be.

He continued that some of the names subject to scrutiny may be directly linked to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, without providing further details or public evidence to support those claims.

Giuliani also revealed that 35 teams have so far managed to enter the United States without any players or coaches being barred from participating, emphasising that the bans were limited to a small number of officials and administrators.

These statements mark the first public justification by a senior US official for the decisions that sparked widespread controversy ahead of the biggest World Cup in history, at a time when US authorities continue to refrain from disclosing the detailed reasons behind the ban on the Somali referee and certain Iranian officials from entering the country.

Featured image via Jay Biggerstaff/Getty Images

By [Alaa Shamali](#)

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