

Spanish football federation leaders ask Rubiales to quit over unwanted kissing scandal

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Madrid, August 30 (RHC)-- Leading officials within the Spanish Football Federation have called on suspended President Luis Rubiales to resign because of his behavior at the Women's World Cup, including forcibly kissing Spain's Women's World Cup player Jenni Hermoso on the lips, sparking worldwide outrage.

The heads of the regional bodies that make up the Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) made the request in a collective statement on Monday.

“After recent events and the unacceptable behaviour that has seriously damaged the image of Spanish football, the presidents request that Luis Rubiales resign immediately as president of the RFEF,” said the federation’s regional presidents in a statement following a meeting on Monday.

The regional leaders said they backed interim RFEF chief Pedro Rocha, who called the meeting, to lead the organisation into “dialogue and reconciliation with all football institutions.” They also called for an overhaul in the federation’s management.

“We will urge the relevant authorities to carry out a profound and imminent organisational restructuring in strategic positions of the federation in order to make way for a new stage in the management of Spanish football,” the regional presidents said.

Prosecutors at Spain’s top criminal court also said in a statement on Monday that they had opened a preliminary investigation into Rubiales’s kiss on the grounds it could constitute a crime of “sexual assault.”

Hermoso said last week that she felt like the “victim of assault” and that the kiss, during the medal ceremony after Spain won the Women’s World Cup in Sydney on August 20, was not consensual.

Prosecutors said in the statement they would contact Hermoso to offer her a chance to file a lawsuit within 15 days.

Rubiales, 46, has been defiant regarding the kiss. At a meeting of the federation on Friday where he had been widely expected to resign, Rubiales instead refused to step down, calling the kiss “spontaneous, mutual, euphoric and consensual.”

RFEF issued a statement saying the embattled president would “defend himself legally in the competent bodies” to prove “his complete innocence.”

Also on Monday, the Associated Press news agency reported that the Spanish federation had called on the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) to suspend it from international competitions because of government interference related to the Rubiales controversy.

A suspension would ban Spanish teams from competitions – such as the Champions League – and the unprecedented request seemed to some to be aimed at provoking Spain’s football fans and powerful clubs such as Barcelona and Real Madrid, plus the men’s national team, into backing efforts to save Rubiales’s job.

Governing bodies of international football have longstanding rules barring national governments from interfering with the running of domestic football federations. In their statement on Monday, the regional RFEF presidents, however, called on the football federation’s interim president Rocha to withdraw that request to UEFA immediately.

Spain’s top clubs are due to take part in Thursday’s Champions League group-stage draw being made by UEFA, and the men’s national team has games on September 8 and 12, in qualifying for the 2024 European Championship.

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