

## **Statement by Steve Simon, WTA Chairman & CEO**

“When on November 2, 2021, Peng Shuai posted an allegation of sexual assault against a top Chinese government official, the Women’s Tennis Association recognized that Peng Shuai’s message had to be listened to and taken seriously. The players of the WTA, not to mention women around the world, deserve nothing less.

From that moment forward, Peng Shuai demonstrated the importance of speaking out, particularly when it comes to sexual assault, and especially when powerful people are involved. As Peng said in her post, “Even if it is like an egg hitting a rock, or if I am like a moth drawn to the flame, inviting self-destruction, I will tell the truth about you.” She knew the dangers she would face, yet she went public anyway. I admire her strength and courage.

Since then, Peng’s message has been removed from the internet and discussion of this serious issue has been censored in China. Chinese officials have been provided the opportunity to cease this censorship, verifiably prove that Peng is free and able to speak without interference or intimidation, and investigate the allegation of sexual assault in a full, fair and transparent manner. Unfortunately, the leadership in China has not addressed this very serious issue in any credible way. While we now know where Peng is, I have serious doubts that she is free, safe and not subject to censorship, coercion and intimidation. The WTA has been clear on what is needed here, and we repeat our call for a full and transparent investigation – without censorship – into Peng Shuai’s sexual assault accusation.

None of this is acceptable nor can it become acceptable. If powerful people can suppress the voices of women and sweep allegations of sexual assault under the rug, then the basis on which the WTA was founded – equality for women – would suffer an immense setback. I will not and cannot let that happen to the WTA and its players.

As a result, and with the full support of the WTA Board of Directors, I am announcing the immediate suspension of all WTA tournaments in China, including Hong Kong. In good conscience, I don’t see how I can ask our athletes to compete there when Peng Shuai is not allowed to communicate freely and has seemingly been pressured to contradict her allegation of sexual assault. Given the current state of affairs, I am also greatly concerned about the risks that all of our players and staff could face if we were to hold events in China in 2022.

I have been gratified by the massive amount of international support the WTA has received for its position on this matter. To further protect Peng and many other women throughout the world, it is more urgent than ever for people to speak out. The WTA will do everything possible to protect its players. As we do so, I hope leaders around the world will continue to speak out so justice can be done for Peng, and all women, no matter the financial ramifications.

I very much regret it has come to this point. The tennis communities in China and Hong Kong are full of great people with whom we have worked for many years. They should be proud of their achievements, hospitality and success. However, unless China takes the steps we have asked for, we cannot put our

players and staff at risk by holding events in China. China's leaders have left the WTA with no choice. I remain hopeful that our pleas will be heard and the Chinese authorities will take steps to legitimately address this issue."