



Many Paths, One Yoga Alliance

May 20, 2015

Maja Makovec Brenčič
Minister
Ministry of Education, Science and Sport
Masarykova 16
SI-1000 Ljubljana
Slovenia

Dear Minister Brenčič,

On behalf of Yoga Alliance, the largest nonprofit organization representing the yoga community, I am writing regarding recent initiatives to regulate yoga studios and teacher training programs in Slovenia.

Yoga Alliance's mission is to promote and support the integrity and diversity of the teaching of yoga. To carry out this mission, Yoga Alliance supports initiatives to celebrate the diversity of yoga styles, traditions and lineages; advocates for self-regulation of the yoga industry and opposes unfair or unnecessarily burdensome government regulation; promotes the worldwide growth of yoga through education; and encourages safe yoga instruction by promoting adoption of Yoga Alliance Registry's voluntary quantitative standards.

In recent weeks, Yoga Alliance has been contacted by Slovenian yoga teachers who are concerned that regulations applicable to the yoga community will ultimately harm the practice of yoga and the yoga industry in your country. Yoga Alliance has observed firsthand in the United States the harmful effects of unnecessary or burdensome regulations on yoga, and have successfully advocated against such regulations in several jurisdictions across the United States. We appreciate the opportunity to share our expertise with you as you consider potential regulation of the yoga industry in Slovenia.

In our experience, most individuals attend yoga teacher training programs – an advanced form of yoga instruction – to deepen their personal practice or practice yoga in a group setting. In this respect, these programs are avocational or recreational activities, and there is no need to place requirements or restrictions on yoga teacher training classes that would typically apply to vocational training programs. Further, we know that otherwise unnecessary regulation on yoga programs tends to dilute the rich practice of yoga.

Moreover, throughout the world, yoga studios vary in size and structure, and many are small and independent businesses. Based on years of experience, we have learned that regulation often burdens small studios disproportionately, forcing them to cancel teacher training programs or close their businesses. Similarly, extensive regulations unfairly favor large, established studios, creating an unfair advantage for larger studios and making it difficult for smaller yoga studio owners to compete. The net effect is the loss of jobs and the loss of a vibrant and healthy yoga community.

We also respectfully disagree with the proposition that yoga is a type of sport and should therefore be regulated as such. Yoga was developed up to 5,000 years ago as a comprehensive system for well-being on all levels: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Physical postures and breathing techniques are only part of the overall discipline of yoga. In fact, the word "yoga" is derived from the Sanskrit term for "union." The "union" of yoga is now commonly understood to refer to the union of the mind, body and spirit. This signifies that yoga's physical aspect is only one part of this union. Although the yoga community has a variety of perspectives about the purpose of the practice of yoga, none of these perspectives emphasize physical exercise as its primary or its only goal. Millions of yogis around the world use various aspects of yoga to help improve their quality of life in such diverse areas as wellness, stress relief, fitness, vitality, mental clarity, healing, peace of mind and spiritual growth. This variety of benefits signifies that yoga cannot be properly classified as a sport.

As your discussions with Slovenia's yoga community continue, we hope you find these observations helpful. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



Barbara Dobberthien
Chief Operating Officer