



Guor Marial, a twenty eight year old marathon runner, has won the right to compete in this year's Olympic Games, despite belonging to no country.

Mr. Marial, who was born in what is now South Sudan, turned down the chance to represent Sudan due to the violence and death suffered by his family during the Sudanese civil war. He is a permanent resident of the United States of America, where he has lived since fleeing Sudan as a refugee twelve years ago, but does not possess US citizenship.

The newly formed South Sudanese state does not have the capacity to field an Olympic team as it has not yet established a National Olympic Committee, an International Olympic Committee (IOC) requirement for nations to be able to compete in the games. All this meant that Mr. Marial, though he had qualified for the Olympics last October after meeting the Olympic "A" standard with a run of 2 hours, 14 minutes and 32 seconds at the 2011 Twin Cities Marathon, was left without a state to represent.

The IOC, however, has now decided to allow Mr. Marial to compete independently, under the Olympic flag. The move has been welcomed by a host of refugee rights advocates, who consider the decision a boon to refugee rights and the new state of South Sudan.

On the South Sudanese people, Mr. Marial told Reuters: "For me, it means a lot to glorify the people who died for their freedom and people who lost their lives, including 28 members of my family and relatives. Their spirit is what allows me to get up every single day, put on my shoes and train to honour them."

Additional links:

- UNHCR website: www.unhcr.org
- Olympic website: www.london2012.com