



General Assembly

Distr.: General
27 August 2019

English only

Human Rights Council

Forty-second session

9–27 September 2019

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 August 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Contemporary forms of slavery in Qatar

Preface

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights presents this intervention to comment on the factors that led to increase the rates of slavery in many countries of the world, especially in Qatar, which commits serious abuses against migrant workers under the cloak of organizing the events of the World Cup 2022. It can be said that Qatar follows the worst policies against them and is dedicated to the system of forced labor, debt bondage and other contemporary forms of slavery.

The situation of workers in Qatar who face persecution and difficult working conditions, has been and is still the talk of human rights organizations and international news agencies, where thousands of migrant workers of Asian descent who work on construction sites, find themselves in conditions similar to slavery. What is happening in Qatar sounds the alarm about violating the most basic human rights. Especially, under unfair conditions in which workers work and caused hundreds of deaths, including the high temperature exceeding 50 degrees Celsius, and mainly caused the rise of deaths and “kafala” system to subject foreign workers under the will of employers in Doha. “Kafala system” denying their rights to act in anything or change their jobs, or even leave without employer’s permission.¹

Manifestations of contemporary slavery in Qatar

Contemporary slavery is defined as the use of violence, deception or the threat to inflict human beings, and subject to forced labor and sexual exploitation, and forced domestic servitude. The Global Slavery Index refers to that men, women and children worldwide are still victims of contemporary slavery by buying and selling them in public markets. Women are forced to marry against their will to provide labor under the guise of marriage, and are forced to work in clandestine factories and houses. Men and children face slavery by obliging them to work on construction sites, shops, farms or on fishing boats under threat of violence.

In Qatar, authorities continue to perpetuate consistent patterns of violations through their legislative, executive and judicial policies that have contributed to violations of international human rights principles. The Qatari Constitution and a number of Qatari legislations are still far from adopting human rights standards, based on racist and discriminatory ideas. Moreover, the national institutional framework on human rights has not succeeded in providing a lever to eradicate human rights violations and ensure accountability, quite the contrary, all national human rights components have been used to cover up crimes. National policies also clearly clash with international human rights standards and with the foundations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The Qatari government overlooked the enactment of preventive legal measures preserving the rights of foreign workers in particular was also reflected in a negative way in violating the rights of women and the right to nationality and work and the right of assembly and association.²

Although the International Labor Organization acknowledged the structural changes introduced by Qatar, including the adoption of a temporary minimum wage in October 2017, improvements to the health and safety system, an inspection system and the establishment of dispute settlement committee to deal with workers' complaints. Although most workers no longer need employers' permission to leave the country, they still need

¹ - 4000 شخص يتعرضون للعبودية الحديثة في قطر، كيوبوست، 22 يوليو 2018، الرابط، <https://bit.ly/2uVKcDU>.

² - تقرير دولي جديد يوثق أنماط العبودية الحديثة في قطر، قطربليكس، 30 أبريل 2019، الرابط، <https://qatarileaks.com/ar/leak> - أنماط العبودية الحديثة في قطر.

what is known as a “no objection” certificate from their employer to change jobs in Qatar. Many employers refuse to provide such certificates and force workers to stay until the contracts end, which can last up to five years. Workers who leave their jobs without their employer's permission can be reported of fleeing and brought a criminal charge against them that can lead to arrest and deportation in contravention of international labor laws and standards.³

Labor conditions in Qatar, particularly those from India, Bangladesh and Nepal, have also seen inhumane conditions in terms of access to food and drink, as well as uninhabitable places for them, and some have not been paid for nearly five months. In a report by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), said that Qatar treats its workers who work on infrastructure projects as slaves, especially under unbearable climatic conditions that make them work under extremely high temperatures in the summer, posing a risk to workers' lives.⁴

Thousands of migrant workers of Asian descent who work on construction sites find themselves in conditions similar to slavery in Qatar. These conditions sound the alarm about violations of the most basic human rights. The Global Slavery Index in 2018 showed that about 4,000 people (or 1.50 per 1,000 inhabitants of Qatar) live in contemporary slavery, pointing out that 37.72 per 100 people are subjected to slavery. Qatar, with a population of 2.4 million, was at the forefront of the list of countries that are least supportive of the government's response to reducing slavery by index.⁵

The Nepalese government has asserted that most international companies operating in Qatar do not meet safety requirements. Many construction workers lose their lives through this gross negligence. Many human rights reports in Nepal confirmed that employers in Qatar failed to create working conditions to protect workers' health. Up to 1,300 migrant workers are reported to have left Nepal on a daily basis for jobs in the Gulf, and many dead migrant workers are returned to Nepal every day.

According to Nepalese government, accidents and poor living conditions cause death of almost 110 people every year. Many Nepalese workers died either in the construction of stadiums or anywhere related to the stadiums in Qatar. The government has tried to file a lawsuit against employers but it is difficult to investigate because of the intermediaries involved in hiring workers who do not provide the workers with proper documentation, as a result it is not easy to prove the responsibility of the company. It is difficult to prove the accountability of the companies involved in the preparation for the FIFA World Cup. The lack of transparency in the recruitment process allows companies to escape lawsuits.⁶

Domestic workers, mostly women, also face a more difficult situation in terms of abuse and exploitation because Qatar's new labor law explicitly excludes domestic workers. In addition to labor abuses, many domestic workers are physically and sexually abused. They are prohibited from accessing to information, support and remedies. They live in controlled places in their employers' private homes with no freedom of movement or rest time and restricted access to the phone and the Internet.⁷

Accordingly, Maat calls Qatari government for the need to ensure the promotion and enforcement of social laws, raise the minimum wage so that foreign workers are not

³ David Conn, Qatar migrant workers are still being exploited, says Amnesty report, the Guardian, 26 Sep 2018, link, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/sep/26/qatar-world-cup-workers-still-exploited-says-amnesty-report>.

⁴ - قطر تخدع المجتمع الدولي بحملات شكلية وعقوبات هزلية بعد انتهاكات ضد عمال الموندiales، قطرليكس، 13 يوليو 2019، الرابط، <https://qatarileaks.com/ar/leak-الدوحة-تخدع-المجتمع-الدولي-بحملات-شكلية-وعقوبات-هزيلة-بعد-انتهاكات-ضد-عمال-الموندiales>.

⁵ - تقرير رسمي حقوقي: 4000 شخص يتعرضون للعبودية الحديثة في قطر، وقع كيوبوست، 22 يوليو 2018، الرابط، <https://www.qposts.com/تقرير-رسمي-حقوقي-4000-شخص-يتعرضون-للعبودية>.

⁶ Sanjay Kumar, Qatar: Nepal confirms ‘many deaths’ in Qatar as show says figure as high as 1,400, Arab News, 11 June 2019, link, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1509121/sport>.

⁷ Accountability for forced labor in globalized economy: lessons and challenges in litigation, with examples from Qatar, ECCHR, p.7- 9, link, https://www.ecchr.eu/fileadmin/Publikationen/ECCHR_QATAR.pdf.

burdened with debt, and stop the practice of some employers who confiscate their workers' passports. It should also activate the control procedures and inspection campaigns against companies that violate international labor laws. In open places or under direct sunlight during this period.

Recommendations

- OHCHR and the Human Rights Council should seriously consider appointing a Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Qatar.
 - The international community must shoulder its responsibilities towards reducing national repressive practices towards migrant workers.
 - Investigations are needed on the ground to find out the abuses that happen against migrant workers in Qatar.
 - Qatar should establish a reform schedule and urgently publish a strong and effective action plan to eradicate excessive restrictions that enable employers to imprison migrant workers in cases of exploitation.
 - The need to amend laws affecting the lives of migrant workers and to activate the law governing the situation of domestic workers in Qatar. In addition to do reforms relating to working hours, and provide safe working environment and recruitment fees, taking into account their needs based on the specific characteristics of this work in order to protect migrant domestic workers.
-