

IMUN 22



HRC

*Addressing Qatar's Human Rights Violations in
Preparation for the World Cup*

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Introduction:

In roughly just a month, the FIFA 2022 World Cup will be hosted in the Middle East for the first time, which will be a momentous and historic event. However, ever since Qatar clinched the rights to the world cup in 2010, weighty controversy and criticism on Qatar's violations of basic human rights have emerged. Qatar has a significantly small population of just 2.6 million people with 90% of its workforce being composed of migrant workers. Without them, hosting the world cup in Qatar would simply not be viable. These migrant workers, who are mainly from South Asia, have been subject to inhumane working conditions as well as severe labor exploitation; they fall under the custody of the oppressive kafala system which has been previously compared to slavery and are minimally entitled to any labor or human rights. Some of the problems that these migrant workers are vulnerable to are high levels of worker debt, illegal and unethical recruitment practices, wage theft, a discriminatory and biased justice system and the minimal to no enforcement of labor laws. The appalling living conditions the workers are subjected to, along with the great emotional toll of labor abuse have caused more than 20% of the 30,000 workers recruited to build World Cup infrastructure to die since it won the right to host the world cup.

The Qatari government has been working on the provision of rights to workers through reforms to the kafala system. From 2014 to 2017 the government underwent a reform process branded as the "abolition of kafala". Nonetheless, the process's most notable achievement was removing the word kafala from the country's laws; the system remained intact. True reform and efforts from Qatar have only been seen recently where Qatar sealed a partnership with the International Labor Organization and erased the concept of exit permits, gave workers the right to change their employer and introduced new methods to seek compensation for wage theft. Be that as it may, Qatar still has a long way to go when it comes to its migrant workers' rights as the new reforms have not been enforced effectively and workers are still deprived of freedom of expression. The spotlight Qatar is currently under serves as a great opportunity to improve freedom and human rights in the country for both Qataris and immigrants.

Definition of Key Terms

Kafala System

Used in Lebanon, Jordan and all Gulf Cooperation Council countries (i.e. Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE), the kafala system is a legal framework defining the relationship between migrant workers and their employers/sponsor (*kafeel*). It was created to supply cheap and plentiful labor in those countries. Under this system, most countries provide local individuals or companies with permits to hire and sponsor foreign workers. The sponsor covers all expenses associated with travel and housing. Rather than hiring individuals directly, sponsors sometimes use private recruitment agencies. Many agencies, pressure groups and NGOs have described the system as oppressive and incompetent as the host countries provide limited to no protection for these workers.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Passed in 1948 in the UN General Assembly, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an essential tool to help understand the international standards set for people's rights and freedoms. The document states that everyone has the right of free choice of employment and to just and favorable conditions of work.

International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of all their Families

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of all their Families is a focal treaty which fully encompasses this topic. The treaty clearly directs states towards taking non-discriminatory measures with migrant workers and enjoins applying measures on safety, health and welfare not less favorable than those applied to locals.

Major Parties Involved

The Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The OHCHR is the main UN body responsible of following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ensuring no breaches of it occur. Most saliently carried out through its Human Rights council. It overlooks The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and all other treaties and conventions.

Amnesty International

Amnesty International's mission is to protect and empower people by conducting rigorous research and initiating measures to end and prevent grave abuses of human rights and provide justice for the deprived section of the community. Amnesty International remains the leading organization in documenting, uncovering and criticizing Qatar's infamous presence of labor abuse and exploitation.

International Labor Organization (ILO)

The ILO is the first and oldest specialized agency of the United Nations whose mandate is to advance social and economic justice through setting international labor standards. It is the government of Qatar's main supporter with matters pertaining to the establishment and acquisition of comprehensive labor reforms.

FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association)

With the aim to spread and administrate football internationally, FIFA is the international governing body of association football, beach football and futsal. FIFA along with its partner host country, are responsible for organizing the World Cup and thus should be unanimously held accountable for any human rights violations preceding or during the World Cup.

The Government of Qatar

The only way in which the human rights conditions in Qatar can change for the better is through the cooperation of the government of Qatar by its consent and willingness to labor reform and its enforcement of new protective laws.

Timeline

1919

The International Labor Organization was founded by the League of Nations.

1946

The International Labor Organization became a specialized agency of the United Nations.

1961

Amnesty International was founded in London.

18 December 1990

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of all their Families was adopted by the UN General Assembly.

20 December 1993

The Office of High Commissioner was founded to observe human rights abuses and violations.

March 2010

Qatar secured the rights to host the World Cup after winning a ballot of FIFA's 22 executive members.

2014

FIFA appointed Michael Garcia as its independent ethics investigator to look into bribery allegations against Qatar and Russia.

2016

FIFA adopted the United Nations Principles on Business and Human Rights.

2017

Qatar diplomatic crisis

Qatar and the ILO sealed a partnership with the objective to carry intensive labor reforms.

2022

The Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup is set to begin in November.

Food for Thought

- To what extent are labor abuses present in your country? What is your country's stance on Kafala?
- What significance do human rights organizations like Amnesty International and HRW hold in uncovering the human rights violations in Qatar?
- GCC countries have often been accused of having high favoritism for their locals, is this true?
- What other human rights issues are present in Qatar?
- To what extent does the suppression of free speech affect migrant workers in Qatar?
- Are Qatar's current reforms and improvements sufficient? So far, have they been effective?

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