

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)
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ITUC OnLine

New evidence of abuses of workers rights in Qatar prompts ITUC investigation

Brussels, 16 May 2012 (ITUC OnLine): The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has announced a new investigation into the conditions of workers in Qatar following a visit of ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow to Nepal to hear first hand accounts from workers who have just returned from the Gulf Kingdom.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said new figures made public during her visit recorded 162 deaths of Nepalese workers in Qatar in the first ten months of 2011. Most of the workers' deaths are unexplained, and are simply recorded as deaths "during sleep" or from "heart attacks".

Nepalese embassy statistics from January - October 2011 show

- * 13 migrant workers committed suicide
- * 22 work-related deaths were documented
- * 92 deaths were unexplained

"One construction worker I spoke to was working outside in 40 degree heat. When he asked to resign, he was not allowed. Instead he was forced to work 18 months in life-threatening conditions, to make enough money for his ticket home, " said Sharan Burrow.

"Many workers die from heat exhaustion, in 2010 this was covered up as heart attacks, now we're told the workers are dying in their sleep."

"These young men are angry about how they were treated. One found out that he was earning \$100 a month less than a colleague doing the same job. When he asked for equal pay, his employer refused. He said he would not work, and wanted to return home, but was kept in Qatar until he had paid for his ticket," said Burrow.

During meetings with President Ram Baran Yadav and Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, Burrow committed the ITUC's support to protect the rights of workers from Nepal and other countries working under extreme and harsh conditions in Qatar.

1.2 million Nepalis are believed to be working in Gulf States including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman.

Qatar is launching one of the largest infrastructure programmes in history, with more than US\$ 100bn in construction investment. Tens of thousands more migrants from Nepal and elsewhere are expected to flood into the country in the coming years. Migrants are banned from forming trade unions, and anyone taking industrial action over issues like safety or unpaid wages is deported.

The ITUC will release the investigation on workers conditions in Qatar towards the end of the year. Negotiations are continuing with FIFA on protections for workers building Qatar World Cup facilities.

The ITUC has warned it will launch an international campaign 'No Labour Rights - No World Cup' unless workers' rights are upheld in Qatar.

Notes:

A UK University study published in 2011 revealed that up to 25% of Nepalese construction workers in Qatar and other Gulf States are injured in work accidents each year.

<http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-698X/11/3>

According to the US State Department, local support groups believe the authorities report "the cause of death as heart attacks to hide workplace deaths."

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154471.htm>

Road traffic accidents are another leading cause of death for migrant workers - Qatar has the highest road fatality rate in the world.

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The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 308 national affiliates.

Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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