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Guilty Verdict for Qatar - Villaggio Nursery Fire

Brussels, 20 June 2013 (ITUC OnLine): Qatar's Ambassador to the European Union, Belgium and Luxembourg, Sheik Ali Bin Jasim Thani Al Thani, and his wife Mrs Iman Hamad Abdulaziz Al Kawari, have been found guilty in a Qatari court today and sentenced to six years over the appalling lack of fire safety and protection at the Gympanzee nursery, which they owned.

Five people were found guilty of the Villaggio nursery fire where 19 people including 13 children were tragically killed on 29th May last year.

Along with the Qatari Ambassador and his wife, Villaggio mall owners, assistant manager and an employee of the Ministry of Business and Trade were all sentenced to six years.

The families of the young children killed in the fire welcomed the verdict and the court decision to find people responsible.

Martin Weekes, the New Zealand father of triplets killed in the fire, said, "Today is a day to remember. To remember the 19 innocent people, including 13 of our beautiful children, killed last year in Villaggio. Loved ones, who will never see justice. Loved ones, we miss more with every day that passes."

"We are still waiting to know what happened on 28 May 2012. The trial only gave us some answers. We still have more questions. To get these much needed answers, we call upon the State of Qatar to release the official report into the disaster. A simple request that will help us all understand what went wrong," said Martin Weekes.

A section of the Villaggio Mall had remained closed following the fire, but was suddenly reopened the day before the verdicts were given.

"Not once have we been shown the dignity to be able to grieve privately where our children were killed. The owners and management, some of whom have been on trial, have shown us no remorse. They should be ashamed," said Martin Weekes.

Lax regulation and poor oversight mean that Qatar has one of the worst fire safety records of any rich country, with official figures showing that 90% of fires remain unexplained.

"Today our thoughts are with the families of the 19 people who lost their lives. We are extremely concerned about the safety of buildings in Qatar, with no oversight of working conditions or public safety.

"More and more people are being put at risk as the construction boom in Qatar continues ahead of the 2022 World Cup.

"To many of us, it appears that Qatar has little value for human life. Millions of workers are used as enslaved labour to build these substandard buildings in unsafe conditions. Those that occupy them as visitors or spectators need to know that Qatar can prevent and avoid tragedies like this," said Sharan Burrow, General Secretary, ITUC.

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 156 countries and territories and has 315 national affiliates.

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