

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

Clamour of criticism about Qatar at European Parliament hearing - FIFA offside

Brussels, 13 February 2014 (ITUC OnLine): FIFA recognised the terrible conditions for migrant workers in Qatar, host of the 2022 World Cup, at a European Parliament hearing today but fell short of calling for an end to the kafala visa system which enslaves people working in the country.

Speaking at the hearing, Sharan Burrow, General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), said, “Qatar is a slave state for 1.4 million migrant workers. It doesn't have to be that way. Qatar chooses to build its modern nation with the labour of migrant workers and deliberately chooses to maintain a system that threatens these workers as less than human.”

Trade unions, human rights groups and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) gave evidence to Parliamentarians about the need for workers in Qatar to have a proper workplace representation and to have a voice without fear of retaliation.

The ILO called for an integrated and comprehensive approach. It referred to the need to reform kafala and for freedom of association and the right to collectively bargain. The ILO noted that Qatar had not accepted its recommendations on these issues in the new charter released for workers building the stadiums and training pitches for the World Cup.

Despite moving testimony from Zahir Belounis, who was trapped in Qatar with his wife and young family when his football club refused to sign his exit permit, FIFA refused to indicate it would call for an end to the kafala system.

“If you continue to run the World Cup in a state which enslaves workers, it shames the game. The Government must end the system of kafala if the World Cup is to be played in Qatar in 2022,” said Sharan Burrow.

“We want to hear from the FIFA President and Executive Committee about how they will guarantee that the World Cup must only go ahead if there is legal reform to kafala and for workers' rights. The new charter from World Cup organisers in Qatar sets out sham conditions, without even any means to ensure that companies comply.

“Today's hearing is an important step for the European Parliament, who can hold European companies to account who are bidding for the billion dollar infrastructure developments in Qatar. “Companies, governments and FIFA must not be complicit in treating workers as slaves in Qatar and the escalating death toll. Our conservative estimate, based on data on deaths of Nepalese and Indian workers alone, is that more than 4000 workers will die before a ball is kicked in 2022,” said Sharan Burrow

The ITUC is calling for the Government of Qatar to:

- End the kafala system;
- Introduce laws to allow freedom of association and collective bargaining so workers have a voice;
- Put in place an effective labour dispute settling process;
- Clean up the recruitment system and work with reputable international recruitment companies;
- End the racially based system of wages with a minimum wage for all workers, regardless of their race or national origin.

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