

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Report - The Case Against Qatar - provokes furious response from local World Cup organising committee

Brussels, 17 March 2014 (ITUC OnLine): A new report from the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) exposes how far Qatar will go to deny workers their rights, ahead of a critical FIFA Executive Committee meeting on Thursday 20th March in Zurich.

The Executive Committee will consider a FIFA investigation into labour rights problems in Qatar, after the ITUC estimated 4000 workers could die before a ball is kicked in the 2022 World Cup. The issue of migrant workers in Qatar, and initiatives that FIFA could take, will be on the Executive Committee agenda on 20 – 21 March.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said Qatar is a government which takes no responsibility for workers, and its response to criticism is focused on public relations.

During a site visit to Al Wakrah Stadium in Qatar, the ITUC General Secretary found 38 workers from India, Nepal and Thailand living in squalor with mattresses on the floor in makeshift rooms underneath the bleachers or stadium seats.

FIFA responded to the ITUC photographic evidence of conditions at Al Wakrah Stadium by describing the situation in Qatar as “complex.”

The Supreme Committee, responsible for the entire 585,000 m2 Al Wakrah precinct development, denied any responsibility for the workers, saying they were not covered by the Supreme Committee Workers’ Welfare Standards designed to appease international unease with labour abuses in the country.

“We are pleased that these workers will be re-housed after the ITUC exposed their situation and raised the case with FIFA. It is regrettable that the Supreme Committee’s “successful inspection” in January did not detect these workers.

That the sporting community of Qatar thought it was reasonable to house workers in these conditions inside the Al Wakrah stadium in the first place appalls us,” said Sharan Burrow, General Secretary ITUC.

“Qatar must change. FIFA can make a difference by making the abolition of kafala and respect for international labour rights a condition of Qatar hosting the World Cup in 2022.

If FIFA demands that Qatar abolish kafala and respect fundamental international rights, it will happen,” said Sharan Burrow.

The report “The Case Against Qatar” <http://www.ituc-csi.org/ituc-special-report-the-case> sets out the broken system for workers in Qatar, how Qatar fails the test of international law and provides new evidence on working conditions including:

- salty water being provided to workers in camps for cooking and washing;
- employers demanding deposits of US\$275 are paid by workers before they are allowed to leave for holidays;
- over 2500 Indonesian maids a year fleeing from abusive sponsors; and
- workers in squalid accommodation at the Al Wakrah Stadium.

FIFA has the power to put conditions on the 2022 World Cup that can make the difference. The ITUC has written to FIFA and the Qatar authorities calling for:

- an end to the kafala system and the right of workers to have a collective voice through freedom of association;
- the use of ethical recruitment companies;
- a non-discriminatory minimum wage, and
- a compliance system that is fast, independent and has appropriate power for sanctions.

In a letter <http://www.ituc-csi.org/international-trade-union-14520> to the ITUC, the FIFA local organising committee claimed the workers at Al Wakrah stadium are not their responsibility. Read the response from Sharan Burrow, General Secretary ITUC to Mr Hassan Al Thawadi, Secretary General, Supreme Committee for Legacy and Development.

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 161 countries and territories and has 325 national affiliates.

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