

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

New ruling from UN on forced labour is a warning to companies doing business with Qatar
ILO demands Qatar must reform laws to stop forced labour and allow workers to form unions

Brussels, 31 March 2014 (ITUC OnLine):: The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has sharply criticised Qatar over its use of forced labour, and called for major labour law reforms including urgent changes to the “kafala” employment system, domestic workers’ rights and compliance with international laws that allow migrant workers to join trade unions and bargain collectively for decent wages and protection at work.

The rulings were approved by the ILO governing body in Geneva at the conclusion of its last session on Friday 28th March.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary said “The ILO’s criticism of Qatar is exceptionally strong, and confirms the appalling lack of even the most basic legal protections for Qatar’s exploited migrant workforce. Qatar’s rulers must end their system of modern slavery, and accept that their outdated and repressive labour laws have to change.”

“The ruling from the ILO puts companies on notice that doing business with Qatar goes against international laws. Until Qatar brings its laws in line with international norms, companies face the reputational and legal risks of using forced labour in Qatar.”

New information from Nepalese and Indian Embassies in Qatar shows:

- Thirty-six Indian and Nepalese workers died in February 2014
- 26 more Indian workers died in March
- 350 Nepalese workers and 166 Indians remain stuck in Doha’s notorious migrant “Deportation Centre”

The ILO noted the widespread problem of non-payment of wages to migrant workers, employers withholding workers’ passports, the lack of penalties applied for forced labour, the absence of sanctions on unscrupulous migration agents, and poor regulation of occupational health and safety, working hours, overtime, rest time and wages.

Qatar was also urged by the ILO to urgently introduce protection for domestic workers, the vast majority of whom are women and who have no protection from exploitation and even assault. “As hosts of the 2022 World Cup, Qatar’s labour practices are under international scrutiny. Last week the FIFA Executive Committee said it will visit Qatar and hold further talks with authorities. With this new ruling from the ILO, international legal and political pressure on Qatar to reform will continue,” said Sharan Burrow, General Secretary, ITUC.

The ITUC has called on FIFA to make freedom of association and the abolition of kafala a condition of Qatar hosting the World Cup in 2022.

The two major findings adopted by the ILO’s governing Body in Geneva last week are:

- Upholding a complaint from the ITUC and Building and Wood Workers International (BWI) on the right of migrant workers to join a trade union and collectively bargain in Qatar. The ILO’s tripartite Committee on Freedom of Association leaves no room for doubt about Qatar’s violations of the fundamental international labour standards which all ILO member states are required to respect and implement; and,

- Severe criticism on the issue of Forced Labour, based on the findings of a special 3-person panel including a government representative from China, an employer representative from the UAE and a worker representative from Nepal.
- Qatar must report back to the ILO by November 2014 on progress to reform labour laws.

ENDS

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Read the ILO report on Freedom of Association in Qatar
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_239692.pdf

Read the ILO report on Forced Labour in Qatar
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_239846.pdf

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