

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

FIFA President's Position Untenable

Brussels, 27 May 2015 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has described FIFA President Joseph Blatter's position as untenable, with the indictment by US authorities of nine FIFA officials and five company executives on corruption charges, and the launch of a criminal investigation by the Swiss Attorney-General's Office.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said, "After 17 years at the head of FIFA, during which the stink of corruption around FIFA grew stronger, Mr Blatter should step down forthwith, and the Swiss authorities should now place FIFA under judicial supervision. With the focus today on corruption charges, the world also mustn't forget that migrant workers in Qatar are still being worked to death as the World Cup infrastructure programme there accelerates to meet the 2022 deadline. FIFA has failed to make labour rights a condition of Qatar hosting the World Cup and impoverished workers there are paying the price."

Ambet Yuson, General Secretary of Building and Woodworkers' International, which has been actively campaigning for labour reform in Qatar and engaging with multinational construction companies to get them to adopt an 11-point plan for workers' rights there, said, "When FIFA puts money over human decency, workers are paying with their lives. The current leadership of FIFA believe that they stand above international law whether it regards corruption, working conditions or human rights. It is time for a change and new FIFA. We need leaders bold enough to take FIFA on a new road and implement international principles of workers' and human rights."

The new FIFA scandal coincides with the release today of a report by the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre on actions, or the absence of actions, by multinational construction companies operating in Qatar. According to the group, only a handful of companies are making serious efforts.
<http://business-humanrights.org/en/construction-firms-in-qatar-only-a-handful-make-serious-efforts-to-improve-conditions-for-migrant-workers>

Yuson said, "Workers in Qatar might get cheated by recruiting agents and exploited by sub-contractors, but in the end it is the big construction companies that are responsible for the working conditions on their sites. They must be able to answer on what they are doing to protect the rights of their workers."

Controversy is mounting inside Russia as well, with the ITUC's Russian affiliates FNPR and KTR condemning a proposal from a member of the national parliament to allow private companies to use prison labour to build infrastructure for the 2018 World Cup.

"Russia's trade unions fought back to amend the so-called 'FIFA law' which would have stripped away vital protections for World Cup workers, yet this proposal would allow companies to profit from using prison labour to build the facilities. FIFA has become synonymous with sacrificing human rights for profit. Only change at the very top can save FIFA from an unfolding disaster of its own making," said Burrow.

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 162 countries and territories and has 328 national affiliates.

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