



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda items 2 and 3

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## **Written statement\* submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[04 June 2020]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## The situation of migrant workers in Qatar in light of fighting COVID-19

### Qatari authorities impose news blackout on the spread of Coronavirus among migrant workers

As the world struggles to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, migrant workers trapped in camps such as those in Qatar are at particular risk of exposure to the virus, especially in light of the notoriously overcrowded labor camps, and lack in adequate water and sanitation meaning that workers are inevitably less able to protect themselves from the virus. Workers' proximity to one another in cramped camps also does not allow for any type of social distancing. The single room in these camps is inhabited by ten workers, sleeping in bunk-beds, which contributed to the spread of the virus among migrant workers. It came as no surprise that Qatar authorities tried at first to keep quiet on the infections among foreign workers on the construction sites of the 2022 football World Cup. However, the State of Qatar had to admit the first cases diagnosed among workers in view of reports by media and international human rights bodies warning about the high risk of transmission among workers, and most dangerously, that the infection can spread from them to the rest of the population. Several reports indicate that the number of actual cases may be much higher than what is acknowledged by the Qatari leadership.

Along the same lines, commuting workers to workplaces is another problem that must be handled. Rajiv S, an Indian immigrant worker employed in the Hamad International Airport expansion project, explained that he is forced to board the company's overcrowded bus, adding that they don't have a place to run away and hide, and that the workplaces lack all preventative measures necessary to protect employees against the coronavirus disease,<sup>1</sup> which contributes to the spread of the virus among other 20 thousand workers, raising death toll to 201, especially among workers in the industrial area of Doha.<sup>2</sup> The surge in the outbreak of the virus in the densely populated commercial districts, where many low-wage migrant workers live, has left workers jobless with no other way to earn a living.

Maat for peace, development and human rights deplores the Qatari authorities continued negligence to provide health care for those infected with Coronavirus. Although Qatar has not yet offered a practical solution to the siege imposed on the overcrowded labor camps, neglecting the rules of social distancing recommended by the World Health Organization to help limiting the spread of the epidemic. Maat is deeply concerned about notoriously overcrowded labor accommodation camps in Qatar, and their lack of all facilities, such as running water and sanitation, which increases the risk of infection.

### Dismissal and non-payment of wages... No fair solutions available

Many Qatari companies have taken advantage of the current pandemic to get rid of hundreds of foreign workers without paying them their wages. Since the beginning of the crisis, more than 28,000 workers have not received their salaries, which has led to malnutrition among these workers due to the lack of money required to buy food.<sup>3</sup> Some companies terminated contracts for some workers, while other have put workers on unpaid leave, and a number of workers said that the company which directly employs them forced them to sign a paper stating it is no longer liable for their salaries. Since the beginning of the crisis, they have each received just 100 rials (£22).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Symptoms Or Not, Migrant Workers Must Work In Gulf Countries. Thelede. 5 Apr, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3fSDVjh>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://cutt.us/cWxFL>. إصابة مئات العمال بـ"كورونا" في قطر.. وتحذير من الأسوأ، سكاى نيوز عربية، 21 مارس 2020.

<sup>3</sup> قطر عمال الموندنال لم يتقاضوا راتبهم منذ أزمة "كورونا" ومخاوف من تفشي الوباء، حفریات، 12 أبريل 2020 <https://bit.ly/3bsyCTV>.

<sup>4</sup> Qatar's migrant workers beg for food as Covid-19 infections rise. Theguardian. <https://bit.ly/2LsFmXC>.

The British Guardian newspaper had revealed the tragic and miserable conditions under which foreign workers in Qatar live, where many workers have been forced to plead for food to return home. The newspaper interviewed about 20 workers who are suffering greatly in Qatar, due to losing their jobs and the lack of any assistance offered by the state. The newspaper pointed out, through investigations, that "migrant workers, in one of the richest countries in the world, who have suddenly been left jobless, with no other way to earn a living, are suffering a mounting sense of desperation, frustration and fear." Many workers said that they suddenly became unemployed, with no other way to earn a living. Others say that they were desperate but unable to return home. Some have been forced to plead for food from their employers or charities.<sup>5</sup>

Qatar may have used the outbreak of the Coronavirus as an excuse to get rid of hundreds of workers who have become a burden on it, after human rights organizations shed light on the poor working conditions they are suffering from, and this has become a source of concern for Doha, which is struggling to polish its image globally with the World Cup 2022 approaching.

### Lack of transparency and tighter control

Migrant workers live under a system of exclusion and isolation without any protection of their human rights. The main reason why migrant workers are being abused and exploited by institutions is partially due to the general view of the Qatari authorities towards the migrant community that degrades migrant workers and treat them as slaves. The working day in Qatar ranges from 10 to 14 hours, often in intense heat with four hours of sleep, and they live in narrow places, lacking the minimum level of humane living and basic services.<sup>6</sup>

The Qatari government has not yet announced the total number of people whose movement is restricted within the areas of migrant workers or the total number of foreign workers who have been infected, or the total number of persons placed in quarantine,<sup>7</sup> and the security forces have not disclosed the exact locations where dead workers have been buried in the desert, far from Doha. It also threatened to arrest and detain everyone who saw the incident and disclosed its information.<sup>8</sup> A Nepalese migrant worker in Doha asked not to be identified told the Guardian, through an encryption application "Signal" that Qatari government imposes a total ban on workers sites, allowing no one to go out and don't reveal the truth.<sup>9</sup>

The Qatari government imposes severe control on the areas of migrant workers, violating their rights and freedoms. The Qatari authorities prohibit voice and video calls through applications such as WhatsApp, Facetime and Skype in order to protect the commercial interests of their telecom companies in the areas of migrant workers, causing serious problems for people using these applications to communicate with their relatives and families, negatively impacting the personal and civil rights of foreign workers in Qatar.<sup>10</sup>

### Recommendations

- Maat for Peace recommends the Qatari government to provide all guarantees and mechanisms that protect these workers from the risk of contracting the virus, as well as the need for all workers to obtain appropriate health care without any discrimination in health care, as well as attention to preventive care to ensure that infections are not widespread.

<sup>5</sup> <https://bit.ly/3bj4nyM> في قطر.. عمال يتسولون "فتات الطعام" لكي يبقوا أحياء، سكاى نيوز عربية، 8 مايو 2020.

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalis\\_in\\_Qatar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalis_in_Qatar) النيباليين في قطر، موسوعة ويكيبيديا، الرابط،

<sup>7</sup> <https://bit.ly/2y3GwFS> العمال الأجانب ضحايا كورونا وسياسات قطر، جريدة العرب، 30 مارس 2020،

<sup>8</sup> عمال المنطقة الصناعية في الدوحة يستغيثون بعد سقوط أحدهم فاقدًا للوعي مرجع سابق ذكره

<sup>9</sup> مرجع سابق ذكره Migrant Workers Can't Afford a Lockdown. Foreignpolicy

<sup>10</sup> COVID-19 lockdown leaves Gulf states' migrant workers penniless in unsanitary condition. International Committee of the Fourth International. 21 April. <https://bit.ly/2T5LrgR>.

- The necessity of resolute international intervention to lobby the Qatari authorities to completely stop working on construction sites, and to return these workers to their homes, while preserving their full financial rights to prevent a fatal catastrophe from taking place.
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