



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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**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.

[21 August 2022]

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



## **Migrant Workers: A Form of Contemporary Slavery in the Arab Gulf States**

About 30 million migrant workers live in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, with about 80% are employed in construction, hospitality and domestic jobs. With nearly 2.1 million migrant workers, constituting about 95% of the population, Qatar has the highest ratio of migrants in the world. The majority of these workers are employed in building stadiums, hotels, railways, and infrastructure related to Qatar's preparation for the upcoming 2022 World Cup, which came along with numerous various violations of the rights of migrant workers (1). According to human rights reports, migrant workers are subjected to uncountable coercive conditions as well as health, environmental and security hazards, which may amount to "forced labor" and "modern slavery", as described by UN experts (2).

In light of the above, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, presents this written statement in order to draw the attention of the esteemed council to the sponsorship system "aka. Kafala system", which is widely applicable in the Arab Gulf States. This system, indeed, is considered a form of contemporary slavery, and this is illustrated by the inhumane living conditions that migrant workers suffer from in Qatar. In addition to the unfair Qatari labor legislations, which have dehumanized migrant workers, the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic have also contributed to exacerbating the suffering of these workers. Alarmed by these facts, Maat for Peace urges the Gulf States legislators and Parliament to closely examine the Kafala system and modify it to allow migrant workers enjoy all their basic rights in accordance with international conventions and treaties.

### **First: The Kafala system as a contemporary form of slavery:**

Maat would like to draw the attention of the esteemed council to the fact that migrant workers make up the majority of the workforce in the GCC countries, and more than two-thirds of the total population. The Kafala system adopted in these countries is considered a form of "Modern Slavery", given the various restrictions it imposes on migrant workers and the grave violations that result from its application (3). Many workers are subjected to abuse, persecution prolonged work hours in return for low wages and sometimes without pay, in addition to being prevented from taking vacations, traveling to visit their families or even changing employment or leaving work (4). The Kafala system allows the exploitation of workers and doesn't apply the principle of equal opportunity; It does not guarantee skilled workers the freedom to change employment or seek better opportunities unless with the written consent of their current sponsor (5). Despite the recent legislative reforms related to the mechanisms for submitting complaints and litigation procedures to resolve disputes, there are still many difficulties and penalties that often prevent migrant workers from resorting to them, in order to preserve their rights (6). Accordingly, Maat calls on the international community to pressure the Gulf countries to develop legislative frameworks that guarantee the right of migrant workers and to gradually work to abolish the sponsorship system and replace it with another system or mechanism that guarantees migrant workers enjoyment of their rights.

### **Second: Violation of the rights of migrant workers in Qatar (Forced Labour):**

Qatar continues to violate the rights of migrant workers, especially in light of its continuous preparation for the upcoming 2022 World Cup, and the subsequent mega infrastructure projects, which made thousands of migrant workers in Qatar vulnerable to forced labor; as they work under unfair conditions that caused the death of thousands (7). According to statistics, about 12 migrant workers died every week between 2010 and 2020, that is, about 6,500 workers died while working in the establishment of the World Cup facilities in Qatar. According to the Pakistani embassy in Doha, 824 Pakistani citizens mysteriously died in the same period and hundreds others were injured during the construction of stadiums and infrastructure for the World Cup. Besides, many workers reported being subjected to wage

theft, exorbitant recruitment fees, and widespread and uncontrolled deceptive employment practices. Migrant workers are prohibited from joining trade unions, going on strikes, or claiming their rights verbally, in writing, or in any way. In addition, extremely high temperatures have caused the deaths of thousands of workers (8). Despite all this, employers across Qatar continue to repeatedly violate workers' right to be paid in full and on time. And the efforts of the Qatari authorities have miserably failed to investigate and reveal violations against migrant workers and to enact quick and deterrent penalties, which only exacerbated this troubling phenomenon, described as “contemporary slavery”.

## Recommendations:

Maat for Peace recommends the following:

- Working to abolish the applicable sponsorship system in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and replace it with the adoption of the open labor market system to guarantee more freedom for the worker to obtain a work permit or change employer;
- Providing additional resources by FIFA to ensure the establishment of a monitoring mechanism through which it can follow up and prevent any other violation of the rights of migrant workers as a result of their participation in the work on the infrastructure related to hosting the 2022 World Cup, or any human rights violations that may occur as a result of hosting the World Cup in the future.
- The necessity of putting pressure on Qatar to set up a national register that includes the names of migrant workers in Qatar, including their nationalities, their salaries, the salaries they received, the delayed salaries, and the date of their disbursement, as well as including the data of the injured and deceased migrant workers, and the reasons that led to injury or death, and the method of reparation and compensation.
- The importance of opening an international investigation by an independent international body to investigate the causes of deaths among migrant workers in Qatar, to prevent their recurrence and to bring the perpetrators and those responsible to justice.
- The need to have a human view of the migrant workers' rights file by the Qatari legislator, and work to develop a legal aid system funded by Qatar to ensure that workers are assisted in appointing lawyers to pursue their cases before the Labor Court, and to ensure equal opportunities for litigation between victims and their opponents, and to ensure that victims receive compensation fair.
- Activating the Penal Code, violations of the Labor Law, and imposing actual penalties on the owners of companies and businesses who exploit foreign workers in Qatar.
- Establishing a mechanism to inspect companies participating in infrastructure construction operations related to the 2022 World Cup, and working to increase the number of labor inspectors significantly; in order to minimize violations of the rights of migrant workers.
- Providing translators in all languages spoken by migrant workers, affiliated with the Qatari Ministry of Labor, so that the workers can talk with them and share their problems, and then the translator would report their complaints to the competent authority to try to solve them.
- Working to monitor and implement the existing bilateral agreements signed with Qatar regarding foreign workers, and cooperating with the Qatari authorities to ensure the protection of workers.

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1. <https://bit.ly/3wmuYbM>  
 2. <https://arbne.ws/3dQ55L6>  
 3. <https://bit.ly/3PF5Vao>

4. <https://bit.ly/3PFLvOO>
5. <https://bit.ly/3QHOjMs>& <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/business-50110444>
6. <https://bit.ly/3wltOwW>
7. <https://bit.ly/3carbY5>
8. <https://bit.ly/3A8zJqt>