

CALL FOR PROTECTION OF SRI LANKAN LABOUR MIGRANT WORKERS IN QATAR

Subsequent to Qatar being awarded to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the government is in the process of building nearly 12 state of the art sophisticated stadiums where almost 2 million migrant workers have been recruited for this purpose of construction mainly from South Asia, South East Asia and Africa regions to complete the task. It is important to highlight the significant increase of Sri Lankan migrant workers to Qatar since it won the bid in 2010. Notably in 2015 Qatar became the number one destination country for Sri Lankan migrant workers where nearly 84,622 Sri Lankans have been deployed under different employment categories. Amongst them nearly 23,000 workers are classified as unskilled mainly from districts of Ampara, Batticaloa, Galle, Kandy and Kurunagaleⁱ

Ever since Qatar won the bid to host the World Cup, it has been under the international scrutiny for continuous violation of the rights of these labour migrant workers involved in infrastructure projects. Despite calls from various international human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Federation for Human Rights, International Trade Union Federation and its affiliates and other global migrant networks advocating and lobbying to improve working and living conditions of such migrant workers, the government of Qatar deliberately ignores such calls and guidelines proposed by the ILO and its constituents in order to work towards labour reforms and guarantee the rights of migrant workers.

It is important to note that the labour migrants work under harsh and deplorable conditions and face severe human rights violations. However, the government of Qatar continues to deny any such claims despite documentary evidence.

For instance, according to complaints received from the Eastern part of Sri Lanka 60 cases were reported from Qatar and have been referred to the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment. Recently human remains of a male migrant worker was repatriated from Qatar where the medical report of the destination country claims that the victim had committed suicide. However, the family of the victim suspects foul play. Time and again recruiting agents promise office jobs but the workers are employed in construction sites as labourers. In case of them wanting to leave due to the work offered, they are compelled to bear the repatriation cost on their own. There are incidents where the Sri Lankan migrant workers are trapped *incommunicado* and have lost all communications with their family members back home.

There are many cases of such repatriation of human remains where the existing system does not allow families of the victims to carry out further investigations into such incidents. Similar situation exists for migrant workers in the entire South Asian region and Qatar continues to ignore any joint efforts to address these issues.

The ILO has deferred consideration of a Commission of Inquiry into Qatar until November 2017.ⁱⁱ The ILO's Governing Body decided to keep open the possibility of a Commission of Inquiry into Qatar despite the Gulf state's unprecedented deployment of dozens of lobbyists at the Geneva meeting aiming to shut down any possibility of the UN body's strongest compliance procedure being applied.ⁱⁱⁱ

However, in a decision released on March 22, the ILO has requested that Qatar continue to provide information on its progress in implementing labour and migration reforms. The decision specifically requests information on Law No 21. of 2015 and Law No 1 on 4 January 2017 relating to the entry, exit, and residence of migrant workers, the Domestic Worker's Law of 8 February 2017, and the 19 October 2016 Laws establishing Worker's Dispute Resolution Committees.^{iv}

While Sri Lanka's GDP depends hugely on the revenue of the Sri Lankan Migrant Workers, the ongoing infrastructure projects in Qatar will no doubt be a significant source of such revenue. Therefore, the government of Sri Lanka will continue to promote employment opportunities for potential male workers to Qatar. Unless the Government of Qatar takes initiatives to develop labour laws to international compliance, Sri Lankan migrant workers will continue to be victimized under inhuman working conditions and laws.

We therefore put forward the following recommendations:

1. On behalf of the Sri Lankan Migrant Workers and their families, we appeal to the Governing Body of the ILO to proceed with the appointment and establishment of the Commission of Inquiry into the rights violation of the labour migrant workers in Qatar.
2. Urging the ILO Sri Lanka office to compliment the ongoing process by the governing body of ILO, Geneva to establish an Independent Commission to Inquiry into the rights violations committed by the Qatar government.
3. We urge the government of Sri Lanka to endorse the decision of the ILO governing body to establish the Independent Commission to inquire into the rights violations committed in Qatar.
4. We call on the government of Sri Lanka to stop deploying potential workers to Qatar, until and unless the government of Qatar complies with international standards and allow the independent commission to carry out inquiry into violations committed in Qatar.

SIGNATORIES:

Organizations

Centre for Human Rights and Development
Lawyers Beyond Borders- Sri Lanka Chapter
Migrant Workers' Network- Batticaloa
Affected Women's Forum – Ampara
Muslim Women Development Trust – Puttalam
National Fisheries Solidarity Movement
Assembly of God, Chavakachcheri
Women Workers Front
Association of War Affected Women- Kandy
Centre for Promotion and Protection of Human Rights
INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre
Institute of Social Development
International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination - Asia Committee
StandUp Movement Lanka
Women's Action Network
Mannar Women's Development Federation
Centre for Development Alternatives
Reconciliation & Peace Desk, Diocese of Colombo
National Peace Council

Individuals

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Ashila Niroshine Dandeniya
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i <http://www.slbfe.lk/page.php?LID=1&MID=213>

ii <https://www.ituc-csi.org/ilo-extends-probe-into-forced>

iii <https://www.migrant-rights.org/2017/03/ilo-defers-consideration-of-comission-of-inquiry-into-qatar/>

iv <https://www.migrant-rights.org/2017/03/ilo-defers-consideration-of-comission-of-inquiry-into-qatar/>