

Correspondence Digest on FOI –0176-17 - Qatar World Cup

14.18 2 March 2014 Extract from Diplomatic Telegram from British Embassy Doha about Qatars World Cup preparations [Redacted]

Detail

1. Periodically, a global sporting event raises the bar and creates a new reference framework for all others. The London 2012 Olympics did that. Qatar's 2022 World Cup has the potential to do so too – but for very different reasons. It is going to be the first competition in the Middle East and the first to be held in one city only. If successful, it will build a hyper-modern new international city and provide a model for labour standards for its regional neighbours. The challenge is massive and the eight years remaining will be a race against time for Qatar and its delivery partners, including many UK companies.

New Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy

2. In January, the Emir replaced the Qatar 2022 Supreme Committee with two new bodies. First, the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy to focus on delivery (including resources, stadium building, and infrastructure development), migrant workers' rights, and legacy. Second, the newly formed Local Organising Committee to cover event and operational planning and coordination with FIFA. The Emir will chair the Supreme Committee with Hassan Al Thawadi remaining as Secretary General. The board consists of ministers from across government, including the Prime Minister/Interior Minister and Ministers of Finance, Transport, Youth and Sports, Urban Planning, and Statistics.

Migrant workers

6. Qatar 2022 continues to grab headlines around the world, whether on the summer/winter debate or the treatment of migrant workers building the infrastructure. While the local press tends to put a positive spin on the situation, The Guardian and other media have continued their steady stream of stories focussing on difficult conditions and human rights violations. Recently, the number of migrant worker deaths has received renewed attention. The Indian government released figures showing 500 Indians have died in Qatar since 2012, which a number of media outlets and others seized upon. The Indian Embassy in Doha and the Qatari Human Rights Committee both defended this figure as being "normal", given the size of the Indian population in Qatar. However, without a breakdown of the figures, it is hard to tell how many of these deaths were related to migrant worker human rights abuse issues, such as workplace accidents or heatstroke, and how many were from natural causes or traffic accidents.

7. The non-media focus has also intensified. In November, the UN Special Rapporteur for Migrant Rights visited Qatar and Amnesty International published their report highlighting the plight of migrant workers. In December, the International Trade Unions Congress sent a high-level delegation to investigate the issue. According to these groups, the Qataris have engaged constructively with them. In early February, Al Thawadi travelled to the FIFA headquarters in Zurich to outline progress so far on the issue, before FIFA's evidence session in front of the European Parliament on the World Cup in Qatar.
8. The Qatari response to the allegations made in recent months includes commissioning an independent investigation by the law firm, DLA Piper, which we expect to be completed soon. They have issued a report to FIFA on improving the condition of workers involved in the construction of World Cup stadiums. The Qataris have recently appointed a UK-based communications specialist to work with the UK media, which is another step in the right direction. The government has announced it blacklisted 2,000 companies in 2013 and a further 500 in January 2014 for labour conditions violations. They have also increased the number of trained labour inspectors and continue to hire new inspectors, with over 11,500 random spot-checks of workplaces carried out in the past three months. The most encouraging signal that Qatar really intends to address the issues is the recent announcement (in their action plan to FIFA) that in future salaries should be paid direct to workers and not agencies or sub-contracting companies. This was a main recommendation of many lobby groups and should reduce cases of workers being trapped in a form of bondage/slavery. I am encouraged that the Prime Minister, Labour Minister, Al Thawadi, and others that are in a position to tackle this problem (and also improve Qatar's international reputation) recognise the need for urgent action and that they have engaged constructively with me and UK visitors.

Comment

[Redacted]

10. Al Thawadi and other key Qataris have acknowledged, publicly and privately, the poor conditions many migrant workers face and promised to address the issue. They recognise the distinction between HMG and the UK media. The key for maintaining a frank, constructive dialogue is for the UK (both HMG and the private sector) to remain at the front of international support efforts. We continue to encourage the Qataris to engage with the media and others and stay front foot to demonstrate their activities and progress, rather than maintaining a policy of silence, which risks being misinterpreted as apathy or a failure to take the problem seriously.

HOPTON

Authorised
Nicholas Hopton | HM Ambassador British Embassy Doha

Contact
Political Section, British Embassy, Doha

Action
Department of UK Trade and Investment

11.15 15 May 2014 E-mail from British Embassy Doha and FCO, Press and Digital Department; HMA Doha

From: British Embassy, Doha
Sent: 15 May 2014 11:15
To: FCO, Press and Digital Department ; Nicholas Hopton HMA Doha
Cc: British Embassy Doha
Subject: RE: Guardian front page: World cup state to scrap harsh laws against migrant

Hi [Redacted]

Thanks for this. I'd suggest changing the first line [Redacted] How about the following:

"We fully support the Qatari government's intentions to reform the current labour law and to abolish the kafala system. We encourage the government of Qatar to put forward a timetable for passing and then implementing this proposed legislation. We stand ready to support these efforts where we can. The UK has raised concerns about the treatment of migrant workers in Qatar and we welcome the seriousness with which the Qatari Government is responding to these concerns."

British Embassy Doha

From: FCO, Press and Digital Department
Sent: 15 May 2014 12:04
To: Nicholas Hopton, HMA Doha ;British Embassy Doha
Cc: British Embassy Doha
Subject: RE: Guardian front page: World cup state to scrap harsh laws against migrant workers

Thanks [Redacted] Is everyone happy with this line (reactive only):

FCO spokesperson: We fully support the proposals put forward by the Qatari Interior Ministry to reform the country's labour laws and hope they are passed into law. We stand ready to support these efforts where we can. The UK has raised concerns about the treatment of migrant workers in Qatar and we welcome the seriousness with which the Qatari Government is responding to these concerns.

Senior press officer Press and Digital Department | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

From: Nicholas Hopton, HMA Doha
Sent: 14 May 2014 18:12
To: FCO, Press and Digital Department ;British Embassy Doha
Cc: British Embassy Doha
Subject: Re: Qatari MOI announces changes to the labour laws

Quick and reactive until [Redacted] gives you something more considered.

Yes - your presumed line is right.

Nick

From: FCO, Press and Digital Department
Sent: Wednesday, May 14, 2014 03:59 PM
To: British Embassy Doha; Nicholas Hopton HMA Doha
Subject: RE: Qatari MOI announces changes to the labour laws

thanks for this. Very useful.

Could I ask for a short reactive line on what we think about this? Some UK media have been following the press conference ([Redacted] from the Guardian for one) and might ask for our response. Presumably we welcome the proposals and the fact the Qataris are clearly taking this seriously. And we hope they are passed into law etc etc?

Senior press officer Press and Digital Department | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

From: British Embassy Doha

Sent: 14 May 2014 15:20

To: British Embassy Doha, Nicholas Hopton, HMA Doha; FCO, Press and Digital Department

Cc: British Embassy Doha

Subject: Qatari MOI announces changes to the labour laws

All,

[Redacted] and I attended the much hyped press conference this afternoon held by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Labour. A diptel will issue tomorrow but the main points were:

- the MOI and MOL had written a series of draft reforms to the labour law, which if approved would effectively abolish the kafala system.
- the government would become the sponsor of workers by issuing work visas. Employers would not pay fees to sponsor workers. Instead there would be a tough system of employment contracts which would stipulate the length of employment. Employees would be allowed to move to a different employer without an NOC letter at the end of their contract (not clear what would happen if a worker tried to move before the contract end date was up)
- exit visas would be issued by the Matrash 2 e-government system, which would automatically grant the exit visa after 72 hours, unless the employer intervened with an objection. If this happened, the case would go to an arbitration committee.
- wages to be paid electronically
- fine for the crime of passport confiscation to increase from a max of 10,000QR to 50,000 QR per confiscated passport.
- penalties for late payment of wages and non-adherence to new accommodation standards.
- the no. of labour inspectors to increase to 300 by the end of the year.

However, although these changes seem positive, they next have to go to the chambers of commerce and the shura council, (where there is likely to be staunch opposition from business leaders.)

The final version would be approved by the council of ministers and finally signed off by the Emir. There has been no timetable specified for passing the law and officials from the two ministries avoided answering questions from journalists about the exact powers of amendment or veto held by the chambers of commerce and the shura council.

From: Nicholas Hopton ,HMA Doha
Sent: 14 April 2014 14:58
To: FCO, Press and Digital Department
Cc: FCO Arabian Peninsula and Iran Department British Embassy Doha
Subject: RE: Early Day Motion - Qatar and Migrant Workers

Thanks. I suggest that HMG should not get drawn into commenting (or retweeting) what the Mirror (KM) puts out. If necessary, the lines below still look right.

From: FCO, Press and Digital Department
Sent: 14 April 2014 16:56
To: British Embassy Doha;
Cc: Arabian Peninsula and Iran Department
Subject: Early Day Motion - Qatar and Migrant Workers

In case not seen – [Redacted] is tweeting saying that [Redacted] is calling for Qatar to lose the 2022 world cup unless it stops abusing migrant workers. Can't find her exact words though I think it's related to this EDM from start of April.

Current press lines on migrant workers:

Concerns over migrant labour in Qatar?

We are very concerned by reports that migrant workers have died in the construction of facilities for the Qatar World Cup. We welcomed the Qatari authorities' pledge to investigate these issues as a matter of urgency. We understand they have engaged a global law firm to investigate the recent reports and present recommendations to the Government. We look forward to their findings.

We welcome Qatar's recently launched Workers Charter, developed with the International Labour Organisation, which seeks to protect the rights of migrant employees. The Charter includes measures on health and safety, living and working conditions, wages and grievances. It also highlights plans to ensure all workers are treated equally and fairly.

The UK will continue to encourage the Qatari authorities and other interested parties to make progress in living and working conditions for migrant labourers. We stand ready to support these efforts where we can. Officials also discuss these issues with international non-governmental organisations.

Have you raised your concerns with the Qatari government?

Yes. Ministers remain very concerned by the treatment of migrant workers in Qatar. Minister for Middle East Hugh Robertson raised the issue with the Qatari authorities on his recent visit. Our Ambassador to Qatar has previously raised our concerns and will continue to monitor the situation closely. The UN Special Rapporteur, François Crépeau, visited Qatar from 3-10 November 2013 to investigate the situation and urged Qatar to effectively implement existing legislations to protect migrants' rights and suggested 14 recommendations.

Do you support the World Cup in Qatar?

We remain fully supportive of Qatar's delivery of a successful world cup. With our experience of hosting the 2012 Olympics, the UK is well placed to support Qatar to realise its ambition of hosting a successful World Cup. The UK and other international partners can support Qatar in meeting its challenges by sharing our experience and expertise. This includes encouraging UK businesses working in Qatar to lead by example ensuring migrant workers living and working conditions meet international standards.

Senior press officer Press and Digital Department | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

From: FCO, Arabian Peninsula and Iran Department

Sent: 18 May 2015 10:50

To: FCO, Media Office Communications Directorate

Subject: RE: Qatar: arrest of BBC journalists: request for lines

All,

Please see below.

[Redacted]

What about migrant workers in Qatar?

Ministers and senior officials frequently raise the issue of migrant workers with the Government of Qatar. We welcome the significant steps Qatar has taken to date in response to concerns raised about the treatment of migrant workers including the recent Cabinet approval mandating electronic wage payments for workers. This is an important step in the right direction towards reforming the current labour law.

Arabian Peninsula and Iraq Department Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Old Admiralty Building, London

21 February 2016 Extract from Diplomatic Telegram from British Embassy Doha about the issue of migrant labour

Successful visit by All Party Group. 2022 World Cup and issue of migrant labour a major theme. Qataris show openness and willingness to engage with trade unions.

DETAIL

1. Seven members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Qatar, co-chaired by Baroness Morris and Philip Lee MP, visited Doha from 17-18 February. They were given an excellent programme. They also met members of the Supreme Council for Delivery and Legacy (responsible for the 2022 World Cup) and visited a stadium under construction and new migrant labour accommodation.

World Cup and migrant labourers

2. [Redacted] In fact, the situation for migrant labourers had greatly improved, including through new accommodation, the introduction of electronic wages system (to ensure prompt payment) and changes to the 'kafala' sponsorship system. The Minister for Labour separately acknowledged that Qatar had not succeeded in disseminating information on worker welfare reform. [Redacted]
3. The Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy updated on progress on World Cup stadia. They highlighted that they were ensuring that contractors respected workers' rights – including through inspections. But they acknowledged that more needed to be done on checking sub-contractors. In their conversations, the APG highlighted lessons learned from UK's 2012 experience. Baroness Morris suggested the research by UK universities on health and safety could offer further opportunities for UK-Qatar collaboration.
4. The APG were given a tour newly constructed labourer accommodation, certified to have met "Supreme Committee standards". This accommodation was clean, well-furnished, included recreational facilities, and appeared well-run. [Redacted]

Comment

11. The Qataris feel that the negative comments about them in the UK media, but also in the UK Parliament, are unjustified. They hope that this visit will help redress this. Their

openness –even more than what they showed – will have helped. We should encourage further visits – including by those more sceptical of Qatar. How Qatar is perceived in the UK Parliament impacts considerably on our ability to deliver here.

British Embassy Doha | State of Qatar

SHARMA

Authorised
Ajay Sharma | HMA Doha

12:40 31 March 2016 Email from FCO Gulf Team to British Embassy Doha and Department of Culture, Media and Sport about Lines on Amnesty Report

From: FCO, Gulf Team
Sent: 31 March 2016 12:40
To: FCO, Press, Communication Directorate ; British Embassy Doha ;Department of Culture Media and Sport
Cc: British Embassy, Doha
Subject: RE: Lines on Amnesty Report re WC2022 site allegations of mistreatment

Thanks [Redacted] some amendments below:

- We welcome the statement made by the Government of Qatar of its commitment to the ongoing, systematic reform of Qatar's labour laws.
- We welcome the constructive and open dialogue that exists between the Government of Qatar and Amnesty International and we hope that this cooperation and dialogue will continue.
- The UK stands ready to assist and support Qatar's continued efforts for implementing the recommended reforms. These reforms take time and the Qatari authorities continue to demonstrate that they are raising standards.
- *If raised* – We note that the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy believes the Amnesty Report doesn't now reflect the latest situation on the ground, and that many of the concerns raised in the report have been addressed. We encourage the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy to continue to aim for the highest levels of scrutiny and oversight of the subcontractors.

Regards,

From: British Embassy Doha

Sent: 31 March 2016 11:13

To: FCO, Gulf Team Department of Culture Media and Sport

Cc: British Embassy Doha FCO , Press, Communication Directorate

Subject: Lines on Amnesty Report re WC2022 site allegations of mistreatment

Ajay has asked if we can refresh the WC2022 lines in light of today's Amnesty International Report in case of press or parliamentary inquiries. I've pasted the existing lines below my signature block, but it might be worth adding something like:

- We welcome the statement by the Government of Qatar that the welfare of expat workers is a top priority and its stated commitment to the ongoing, systematic reform of Qatar's labour laws.
- We also welcome the constructive and open dialogue that exists between the Government of Qatar and Amnesty International and the commitment by the Government of Qatar to investigate the contractors named by Amnesty in the report. We hope that this cooperation and dialogue will continue.
- As the International Labour Organisation and UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights, Prince Zeid Ra'ad have recognised, Qatar has made much progress on improving standards for its workforce and the UK stands ready to assist and support Qatar's continued efforts for implementing future reforms.
- *If raised* – we note that the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy believes the Amnesty Report doesn't now reflect the latest situation on the ground, and that many of the concerns raised in the report have been addressed. We encourage the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy to continue to aim for the highest levels of scrutiny and oversight of the subcontractors.

Comments welcome...

Many thanks,

British Embassy Doha

UK AND QATAR: WORLD CUP 2022



TOP LINES

- Migrant Works / Human Rights
- Hosting the 2022 World Cup has seen an increased focus on human rights in Qatar, particularly the welfare of migrant workers central to delivering the country's ambitious infrastructure plans.
- The Qatari government has taken steps towards tackling the problem, including announcing a 'Workers' Charter', developed with the International Labour Organisation, which seeks to protect the rights of migrant employees.
- In February 2015, the Emir of Qatar approved an amendment to the national labour law involving the payment of workers through direct bank deposits. Under the new provisions, companies will be required to pay their employees through direct bank transfers, making it easier for workers and the government to scrutinise and document any late or non-existing payments. This became mandatory in November 2015.
- The Qatari government continues to recognise the need to raise standards and enforce the new laws. There are nearly 300 housing inspectors, with 400 fully trained inspectors planned by the end of 2015.
- We welcome the steps Qatar has taken to date by listening to concerns raised about the treatment of migrant workers, including plans to reform the sponsorship system by the end of 2015, raising accommodation standards, and appointing even more housing inspectors. Important that the international public/media are aware of the steps that are being taken to improve the situation.
- The UK stands ready to assist and support Qatar's continued efforts for implementing the recommended reforms. These reforms take time and the Qatari authorities continue to demonstrate that they are raising standards.

Migrant Workers / Human Rights

The ITUC claim 4,000 migrant workers will die before 2022 building World Cup projects – isn't this another reason to boycott the 2022 Qatar World Cup?

- We judge that the 4,000 figure is an extrapolation of inaccurate figures.

- We are urging the Qatari government to produce an accurate figure of migrant worker deaths, as well as tackling the root causes of the issue by improving health and safety on work sites and access to worker health care.

14:30 31 March 2016 Email from British Embassy Doha to FCO internal Qatar Circulation

From: British Embassy Doha

Sent: 31 March 2016 14:30

To: FCO Internal Qatar Political circulation

Subject: Qatar Political Round-up

All,

Please see below key political developments in Qatar this week:

- **Amnesty's guilty verdict against Qatar: The ugly side of the beautiful game**: Qatar 2022 world cup has been under scrutiny again, with the release of Amnesty International's in-depth report 'the ugly side of the beautiful game' on the living and working conditions of the men building the stadiums for the 2022, accusing Qatar of systematic abuse of workers on the World Cup sites.

The Qatari government was quick in responding to the accusations through its Government Communications Office (GCO), voicing its concerns over a number of allegations contained in the report and announcing that 'the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs intends to investigate the contractors named in the report.' According to the GCO statement, efforts to improve labor rights 'are a work-in-progress', adding that many of the points raised by Amnesty have already been addressed through recent legislative changes. The Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SCDL) described some of Amnesty International's latest findings as 'misleading', saying that many of the issues mentioned had been addressed much before they were raised by the human rights body.

Local media has widely but factually reported on the Amnesty's report, focussing on the local official response. Only one rebuttal opinion piece by the managing editor of the leading Arabic newspaper Al Raya accused Amnesty's findings of being 'misleading', describing the report as 'ugly' (in reference to the report's headline).

Comment: The amnesty report has been due for publishing in February, but was delayed after discussions with the SCDL over the content. The story featured widely in the UK and international press ensuring Qatar's World Cup reputational issue continue to blight their World Cup preparations. It is encouraging though that the Qatar government put out a swift and constructive response, [Redacted]

Best regards,

British Embassy | Doha, Qatar

5 December 2016 Extract from Diplomatic Telegram from British Embassy Doha about a 'Sharaka' that touched on health and safety and workers rights

|
2030 National Vision/ World Cup

[Redacted]

Mr Ellwood reiterated our support for the World Cup in Qatar and the strong interest of UK businesses. He pointed out that UK firms wanted to see a level playing field when it came to the award of contracts. Some companies were able to present cheaper proposals because they didn't respect health and safety and workers' rights as much. Al Muraikhi noted the steps Qatar had taken on workers' rights to address criticism. Mr Ellwood said he would like to visit a World Cup site and workers' accommodation on his next trip. Al Muraikhi responded positively. Mr Ellwood expressed UK willingness to support ethical recruitment and improve health and safety for workers.

|
[Redacted]

SHARMA

Authorised

Ajay Sharma | HMA | HMA British Embassy Doha

14:03 14 December 2016 Extract from Diplomatic telegram from British Embassy Doha about Qatar Workers Rights: Changes to the Labour Law

Summary

Long-anticipated changes to Qatar's labour law came into effect on 13 December. These end the controversial sponsorship system and give more rights to non-Qatari employees. An important step in the right direction. Critics of labour rights in Qatar will still want more. Potential for UK/Qatar work on health and safety and ethical recruitment.

1. On 13 December -13 months after it was approved by the Shura Council – a new law (Law 21) which amends the 2004 Labour Law and regulates the entry, exit and residence of expatriates in Qatar came into force. Key changes under the law are:
 - ❑ Employees should see an electronic copy of their contract before leaving their country of origin, to reduce the incidence of workers forced to sign less favourable contracts on arrival in Qatar. Work visas will only be approved for contracts reviewed by the government.
 - ❑ Foreign workers on fixed-term contracts can now change jobs without their employer's approval at the end of their contract. Those on open-ended contracts can switch employers after five years.
 - ❑ If a person can prove they have been mistreated or exploited by their employer, they can petition the Ministry of Labour for a job change before the end of their contract.
 - ❑ If an employee's contract is terminated while they're in the country, they have three months to find a new job before having to leave. There is no longer a two-year ban on returning to Qatar if a worker finds a new job.
 - ❑ Employers can now be fined if they are found to have confiscated their employees' passports.
 - ❑ Employees must still ask their employers for permission to leave the country for any reason but will now have recourse to an Exit Permit Grievance Committee if this is refused.
2. These changes to the Labour Law are the latest in a series of steps Qatar has taken in the last 12 months to address some of the intense public criticism of its human rights record relating to migrant workers since it was awarded the 2022 World Cup. The government has brought in new legislation and implemented other initiatives to improve the conditions for labourers, though some of these are led by the Supreme Committee (responsible for the World Cup) and relate only to workers on those projects, not all migrant workers. The Supreme Committee for the World Cup signed an MoU in November with Building and Woodworkers International to do joint inspections of work sites and accommodation. Changes already in place include Law No.1 of 2015 requiring employers to pay workers by bank transfer (85% of expat workers are now being paid this way); a (continued) increase in accommodation inspectors and training to improve their skills; and regular inspections of construction sites, including by an independent (British) company. Further improvements in the pipeline include an electronic system for complaints which workers should find easier to access; a committee to resolve conflicts between workers; and a committee to look at financial disputes.

Comment

3. This law says a lot about how the issue of migrant labour plays out in Qatar:
[Redacted]. As ever, the real value of the law will only be seen in how it is implemented.
We should welcome the fact it has come into force and encourage effective implementation of this law, but also of the other measures that Qatar has introduced to enhance workers' rights.
4. International critics of labour rights in Qatar will undoubtedly call for further (legislative) changes. [Redacted] . Focusing on improving health and safety and ethical recruitment (to combat the exploitation by recruiters in 3rd countries) is likely to be more productive in terms of improving the conditions for workers here. Both are potentially areas - given our work on modern day slavery and the experience of the Health and Safety Executive - where we could make a tangible difference. I recommend that we explore this with them further.

SHARMA

Authorised

Sharma | HMA HMA British Embassy Doha