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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

Qatar: UN Human Rights Rapporteur exposes truth on migrant workers and calls for ILO standards to be met

Brussels, 13 November 2013 (ITUC OnLine): International unions are calling on the Qatar authorities to give an immediate response to the request for urgent reforms for migrant workers following a ten-day UN investigation in the country.

Sharan Burrow, General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation, welcomed the recommendations by Francois Crepeau, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, including the right to form and join trade unions, proper grievance procedures, a minimum wage and the abolishment of the kafala system.

“Despite claims by the Qatar authorities that they are cleaning up labour camps and clearing overcrowded deportation centres holding women and their babies, the UN Special Rapporteur has witnessed the horrific conditions facing migrant workers in Qatar and put forward strong recommendations that if implemented will make a real difference to the lives of migrant workers in Qatar,” said Sharan Burrow.

The UN recommendations were announced as FIFA President Sepp Blatter made his ‘courtesy’ visit to the Emir following the deaths of construction workers building World Cup infrastructure.

“Promises of labour law reform were given by Mr Blatter following his meeting with the Emir. Most of these promises have been on the table for years, but now is the time for Qatar to turn words into action to put an end to the horrific exploitation of the migrant workforce. We can only hope that these reforms meet the tests set out by the UN Special Rapporteur.

“This is a global dispute that must have a global solution, and it’s clear from the UN report that the solution must include ILO standards.”

Contrasting the UN experts’ visit with Sepp Blatter’s to ‘courtesy’ trip, Burrow said, “Mr Blatter has left Qatar with no guarantees for 1.3 million migrant workers toiling to deliver the World Cup under slave-like conditions. There are no guarantees they will be paid on time or even have a minimum wage, or be allowed to change jobs, leave the country or afforded ILO rights and protections.”

The legal and political solutions that will give workers their rights are available to the Government of Qatar, the world’s richest country.

The ITUC is calling on the Qatar authorities to:

End the kafala system so workers can change employers and freely leave the country;

Pass national laws allowing freedom of association for migrant workers, giving them the right to form and join trade unions and collectively bargain for fair wages and safe work;

Overhaul grievance procedures for labour complaints;

Work with international recruitment companies to clean up the mass recruitment of migrant workers;

Introduce a fair and non-discriminatory minimum wage.

Following Sepp Blatter's departure from Qatar, French footballer Zahir Belounis once again had his hopes of being allowed to leave the country dashed. Despite an apparent agreement between the French and Qatari governments for his release, Belounis' employer has again refused to let him go from Qatar.

"Zahir has been trapped in Qatar for two years. He and his family are amongst the many victims of the vile kafala system, and it is heartbreaking to witness the vindictive and inhuman treatment he is being subjected to by his football club. World football is being dishonoured by Qatar and FIFA must not stand by," said Burrow.

The ITUC will be visiting Qatar early next month.

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