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Qatar: situation of migrant workers

European Parliament resolution of 21 November 2013 on Qatar: situation of migrant workers (2013/2952(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolution of 24 March 2011 on European Union relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council¹,
 - having regard to the EU-Gulf Cooperation Council Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting in Manama, Bahrain, of 30 June 2013,
 - having regard to the United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families of 18 December 1990,
 - having regard to the announcement by the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) of 2 December 2010 regarding the selection of Qatar as the venue for the 2022 Football World Cup,
 - having regard to Qatar's ratification of the International Labour Organisation Convention concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour (C029) on 12 March 1998,
 - having regard to the decisions of the Qatari Minister of Civil Service and Housing on the application of Labour Law No 14/2004 on regulating the conditions and procedures for issuing licences to Qatari nationals wanting to employ foreign workers, of 22 August 2005, and on Qatar's Sponsorship Law No 4, of 2009,
 - having regard to the mission statement by the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, François Crépeau, of 10 November 2013,
 - having regard to the reports of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International (AI) on the situation of Qatar's construction workers ahead of the World Cup and the recent visit to Qatar by the Secretary General of Amnesty International,
 - having regard to Rules 122(5) and 110(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas there are an estimated 1.35 million foreign nationals in Qatar, making up nearly 90 % of the country's workforce; whereas migrants are employed largely in construction, services and domestic work; whereas these figures give Qatar the highest ratio of migrant workers to domestic population in the world; whereas at least 500 000 more migrant workers are expected in Qatar to accelerate construction work in preparation for the 2022 Football World Cup; whereas the majority of migrant workers come from India and Nepal, but also from Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka;
- B. whereas, according to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), figures obtained from the Embassies of India and Nepal in Qatar show that an average of 200

¹ OJ C 247 E, 17.8.2012, p. 1.

workers from each of those two countries die every year in Qatar, a situation that may further deteriorate in the run-up to the 2022 World Cup;

- C. whereas the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has warned that Qatar has not yet fully implemented the international convention banning the use of forced or compulsory labour, which it ratified in 1998; whereas the ILO has set up a tripartite committee to review the evidence and make recommendations to the Government of Qatar on how to comply with its international commitments;
 - D. whereas the Chair of Qatar's National Human Rights Committee admitted that 'there had been some problems' and pledged that he and the government were doing their utmost to put these right; whereas the Qatari authorities have announced that the labour laws will be amended and that accommodation for workers is being built;
 - E. whereas the visa sponsorship rules, known as the 'kafala' system, mean that workers cannot change jobs without their employer's permission and cannot leave the country unless their employer signs an exit permit; whereas the kafala system is often exploited, as employers withhold workers' passports and wages and workers are charged fees as high as USD 3 500 to obtain a visa from the 'kafeel', or sponsor, leaving migrant workers with excessively high debts;
 - F. whereas the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) lodged a complaint with the Qatari Ministry of Labour against a number of Qatari companies in March 2013; whereas the Labour Relations Department of the Qatari Ministry of Labour received 6 000 worker complaints in 2012; whereas the ITUC and Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) have denounced this situation and jointly filed complaints with the ILO about working conditions and freedom of association in Qatar;
1. Considers regrettable the deaths of migrant workers in Qatar and expresses its condolences to their families;
 2. Is concerned about the situation of migrant workers in Qatar, including long working hours, hazardous working conditions, going unpaid for months, having their passports confiscated, being forced to live in overcrowded camps, being denied the right to form unions, and having no access to free drinking water in extreme heat;
 3. Recognises the challenges facing the Qatari authorities in managing a national labour force of which nearly 90 % is made up of migrant workers, as well as the practical challenges related to enforcing the law in this respect;
 4. Welcomes the announcement by the Qatari Government that it will blacklist companies that abuse migrant workers; welcomes the efforts made by the government and, in particular, by Qatar's National Human Rights Council (NHRC) to raise awareness among migrant workers about their rights and duties under international law; commends, in this connection, the NHRC's decision to set up a new centre to address and resolve migrant workers' complaints;
 5. Calls on the Qatari authorities to effectively implement existing legislation in this field, including by enforcing the ban on confiscating passports, by prosecuting violations and by imposing meaningful sanctions on companies and individuals who violate laws designed to protect migrants' rights; welcomes the Qatari authorities' commitment to adopt legislation

on domestic workers that includes meaningful protection of labour rights and effective compliance mechanisms; calls, in this connection, for the speedy adoption of the draft law on domestic workers that is currently being debated by the Supreme Council of Family Affairs; notes that the majority of domestic workers are women;

6. Welcomes the proposal by the relevant government authorities to conduct investigations into all allegations, and the Qatari authorities' promise to increase the number of labour inspectors charged with monitoring the enforcement of proper labour laws; expects the labour inspectors to receive training on human rights standards and hopes that they will be supported in their work by interpreters;
7. Is concerned about the detention of individuals solely because they have 'run away' from their employers and calls on the Qatari authorities to stop such practices; further urges that all migrants deprived of their liberty have the means of contacting their families and consular services, have access to a lawyer and an interpreter, and have the right to challenge their detention promptly;
8. Welcomes the reported movement towards resolving the problems facing the French football players Zahir Belounis and Stéphane Morello, who have fallen foul of the sponsorship system and have thus been prevented from leaving the country, and calls on the Qatari authorities and on FIFA to make sure that such cases do not occur again;
9. Calls on Qatar to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
10. Calls on Qatar to ratify the ILO conventions, including those on migrant workers, freedom of association, the right to organise and collective bargaining, domestic workers, and private employment agencies and to consider seeking technical assistance from the ILO to ensure that Qatari legislation and practice is in line with these conventions;
11. Calls for the establishment of more shelters for migrant workers, with a special focus on shelters for women and children which are suitable for their needs; welcomes the announcement on 9 November 2013 of the construction of accommodation for 60 000 workers, to be opened in December 2013;
12. Reiterates that the ratification and full implementation by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states, including Qatar, of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families should be a key issue in EU-GCC relations;
13. Appeals to the responsibility of European corporations building stadiums or other infrastructure projects in Qatar to provide working conditions that are in line with international human rights standards and encourages the EU Member States to take steps to ensure that their engineering, construction and consultancy firms comply with Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development guidelines and with the Ruggie Principles;
14. Calls on the Qatari authorities to work closely with the relevant authorities in migrant workers' countries of origin, which should monitor the role of recruitment agencies supplying migrant workers to Qatar; calls on the European External Action Service to support the sending governments, notably in Asia, in delivering better treatment of the

migrant labour force;

15. Welcomes the call by the international footballers' union, FIFPro, for independent workplace experts, appointed by FIFA and the ILO, to be given access to all sites and the power to make binding recommendations to ensure that international labour standards are respected in Qatar;
16. Reminds FIFA that its responsibility goes beyond the development of football and the organisation of competitions and calls on it, with the active support of its European members, to send a clear and strong message to Qatar to prevent the preparations for the 2022 Football World Cup being overshadowed by allegations of forced labour;
17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Government and Parliament of the State of Qatar, the governments and parliaments of the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.