



BWII • Building and Wood Workers' International
BHI • Bau- und Holzarbeiter Internationale
BTI • Byggnads- och Träarbetar-Internationalen
IBB • Internationale des Travailleurs du Bâtiment et du Bois
ICM • Internacional de Trabajadores de la Construcción y la Madera

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Press Release

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BWII mission decries Qatar's lack of urgency to stop abuses

The Building and Wood Workers' International (BWII) concluded its investigative mission in Qatar after a series of media exposés on the exploitative and scandalous situation of building workers as the country prepares for the FIFA World Cup 2022.

The team of health and safety experts, labour inspectors, and union leaders from 9 European and 2 Asian countries found disturbing evidence of wrong practices and gathered testimonies about the violations of internationally accepted labour standards.

In a press conference at the last day of the Mission, the group concluded that, "While there are workplaces that are better off, it does not imply that the situation is the same in the whole country. The evidence gathered and complaints forwarded to us indicate that the decent work deficit remains widespread and a climate of fear persists. One worker in a slave-like situation is one too many. This is not acceptable and the plans and reforms presented by the authorities lack the urgency needed in this situation".

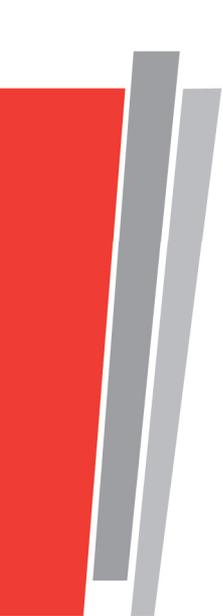
The mission met with many young men from Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Philippines who have found that their dreams of improving their lives and for their families have been shattered by the harsh realities of their living and working conditions in Qatar.

In some cases, many have wished they never left their home country due to the "sufferings" in Qatar. Workers have found that promises made by the employers regarding wages, work hours and working and living conditions are not met. Their freedom of movement is severely limited with the withholding of passports and restrictions of where they can go. They are in constant debt to recruiters and moneylenders. They are forced to live in crowded, squalid camps. These workers have no constructive mechanism for filing labour disputes and complaints due to the complexity of the judicial system in Qatar.

BWII cited the concept of "general responsibility" in a construction contracting chain and reiterated the equal responsibility of the client and the government. BWII also reminded the Qatari authorities that labour inspection means full access and work places should not be prepared beforehand. It must be characterised by strong enforcement and penalty system.

The Mission saw good working conditions in the Sidra hospital project of the Spanish firm OHL and at the Norwegian project Qatalum with both firms having concrete policies and practices on workers protection.

In meetings with Qatari authorities, the mission were briefed about the "Workers' Charter" of the Qatar 2022 Supreme Committee, the body responsible for the delivery of the FIFA World Cup. This one page document outlines a series of principles on health and safety, employment standards, equality, dignity, wages, working and living conditions, wages, grievances, access to information and training. These principles are not well defined, do not refer to internationally recognized standards, and do not include workers' rights or trade union rights.



The Qatar Foundation, for its part, explained their “Mandatory Standards of Migrant Workers’ Welfare for Contractors and Subcontractors”. It is a detailed document, covering many aspects of recruitment and living and working arrangements and would represent a substantial improvement if it were to be properly implemented and enforced.

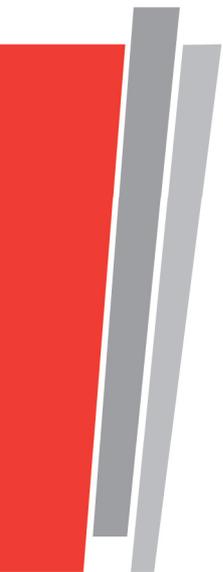
However, BWI concluded that in the absence of real rights and legal protections that meet international standards, migrant workers in Qatar will be no more protected by these charters than they are under current Qatari law.

The Mission asserted that “the current measures are insufficient to address the overarching structural problems. What is needed is to make their plans erase the exploitative situation that thousands of workers face. Bolder steps are needed now, not in the future.”

Ambet Yuson, BWI General Secretary, further emphasised that “dialogue is not only the exchange of information. Its essence is problem-solving and we are here to contribute in curbing the abuses that has been reported globally by many media outlets, trade unions, and human rights organisations. We will be relentless in pushing for a new reality in Qatar.”

BWI proposed at the end of the Mission the following concrete recommendations:

- The right to self-organisation is the basis of problem-solving in the workplace. It must be recognised immediately. The atmosphere of trust in conversations among workers is the best labour inspection and BWI believes that unions make work safer.
- Qatar should include ratification of core ILO conventions, mandatory establishment of health and safety committees in work sites, creation of strong labour inspection system.
- That the government to prohibit employers from confiscating passports and banning illegal recruitment fees.
- Qatar should abolish its bad laws, such as the notorious *kafala* system of sponsorship-based employment and the exit visa system that gives employers unchecked power to stop workers from leaving the country. The reform efforts must be based on clear timetable.
- Practical steps have to be made on illegal and outrageously high recruitment fees, and prohibit companies from doing business with recruitment agencies and subcontractors, in Qatar and abroad, that impose illegal charges on workers,
- Ensure that employment contracts signed by migrant workers are in languages that migrant workers can read and understand. Employment contracts signed in the home countries must be honoured and should not be altered in Qatar without the agreement of migrant workers and impose meaningful sanctions on companies and individuals who violate laws designed to protect migrant workers’ rights.
- Establish an effective dispute system or labour court to address complaints by migrant workers related to employment contracts, workers compensations, back wages, and other labour disputes.

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- Impose meaningful sanctions on companies and individuals who violate laws designed to protect migrant workers' rights.
 - Create an extensive complaint mechanisms on violations of labour and human rights

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Note: Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) is the global union federation for workers in the building, construction, building materials, forest and wood and allied industries. It represents 12 million members from 333 unions in 120 countries. Its headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland. The BWI sports campaign started in South Africa for the World Cup 2012 and then moved to EURO 2012 in Poland and Ukraine as well as in WC 2014 Brazil. The Qatar campaign started very early due to the fact that migrant workers building the stadium and other infrastructure are exposed to bad working conditions and have no trade union rights. It will launch the WC 2018 Russia campaign in the end of 2013.