

6th June 2014

Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani

Emir of Qatar

Dear Mr Emir of Qatar,

We are the International Domestic Workers Federation, representing domestic workers from 49 affiliates in 40 countries. This year domestic workers around the world will celebrate the third anniversary of the adoption of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention 189, a landmark international treaty providing key labor protections to domestic workers, who have historically been excluded from basic protections and who are often especially at risk of abuse.

Dozens of governments have taken concrete steps to strengthen legal protections for domestic workers in the past few years. However, we are dismayed by the lack of action on the part of the government in Qatar in view of the seriousness and gravity of the situation of migrant domestic workers in Qatar. There continue to be reports of grave and unacceptable human rights violations of domestic workers in Qatar, including cases of forced labour. This is causing great concerns in the international community.

According to the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants in Qatar in April, the Special Rapporteur “met domestic workers who had run away from their employers after severe cases of physical, mental and sexual abuse. Some were overworked, forced to work as much as 21 hours per day, and “loaned” to other employers. Some reported not being given food, while others had not been paid their salaries for up to 10 months. Some were injured in accidents in the home. The vast majority had had their passports confiscated.” Underpinning this exploitation is the “Kafala System” which gives migrant domestic workers’ employers the status as their “sponsors” who have the power to stop the domestic workers they employ from changing employers, and even from receiving authorization to leave Qatar.

In the last 10 days, we participated at the 103rd Session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva. Our main focus there was on the ILO discussion on the Forced Labour Convention No. 29 with a view to achieving a binding Protocol to strengthen and update international law to fight forced labour experienced by too many domestic workers, in particularly migrant domestic workers.

For the same concern and goal, today we have come to the Qatar Consulate in Geneva to submit to you a petition of domestic workers from around the world to take immediate measures in line with international standards to guarantee human rights, including labour rights of all migrant domestic workers in Qatar specifically the following:

1. To ratify and implement the relevant international labour conventions and UN conventions, in particularly the ILO C189 and Convention 97;

2. To adopt a minimum wage and to revise national labor laws to include domestic workers including with such key protections as a weekly rest day, annual holidays, limits to working hours, sick leave, and workplace safety, among others;
3. To abolish the “Kafala System” to reduce the risk of abuse by ensuring migrant domestic workers can hold their passports, change employers, and leave the country freely.

As Qatar is moving towards more engagement with the international community, we believe it is in the interest of your government to bring your labour and human rights policies and legal framework in line with international standards. The thousands of migrant domestic workers in Qatar provide valuable services and should be treated with dignity and full respect for their rights.

We would be happy to meet in person to discuss these issues further.

Yours faithfully

Myrtle Witbooi

President

Elizabeth Tang

General Secretary