



Trades Union Congress

The Rt Hon David Cameron, MP
The Prime Minister
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our ref: euird/qat/pm
date: 28 October 2014
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Dear Prime Minister

Modern slavery in Qatar

I understand that you will shortly be meeting Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar, and I would be very grateful if you could ask him to give his personal assurance that the government of Qatar is taking concrete steps to end the slavery and abuse of migrant construction and domestic workers.

Conditions for foreign workers in Qatar, including those building the infrastructure needed for the 2022 World Cup, continue to be of grave concern. Figures confirmed by Qatar show that 964 workers from India and Nepal alone died between 2012 and 2013, a rate of 40 every month, with unsafe working and living conditions equally to blame. Many other workers are left for months without pay. These workers are completely trapped by the sponsorship system known as *kafala* which gives employers complete power to grant or deny workers the right to leave Qatar.

Under international pressure Qatar has introduced new labour laws, but the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has found no evidence that the laws are enforced. The power conferred through *kafala* allows employers to use the right to leave the country as a bargaining chip when workers do access the legal system, as happened in the case of the footballers Abdes Ouaddou (formerly of Fulham) and Zahir Belounis, as well as celebrated round-the-world yachtswoman Tracy Edwards. These people were well enough known to escape. Hundreds of thousands of anonymous Indian, Nepalese and Bangladeshi workers are not so fortunate.

In May this year Qatari officials announced the “end of *kafala*”. Although the announcements represented only the slightest reform to the system, the Qatar authorities have

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admitted that no changes will be made until next year at the earliest. No detailed timescale has been attached to the changes, and the highest levels of government have given no public backing for the announcements.

It would reassure those concerned for the fate of the workers whose lives are still at risk if the Emir confirmed his support for the continued reform of labour laws and their effective implementation, including a definitive statement guaranteeing and providing a detailed timescale for the promised abolition of *kafala*.

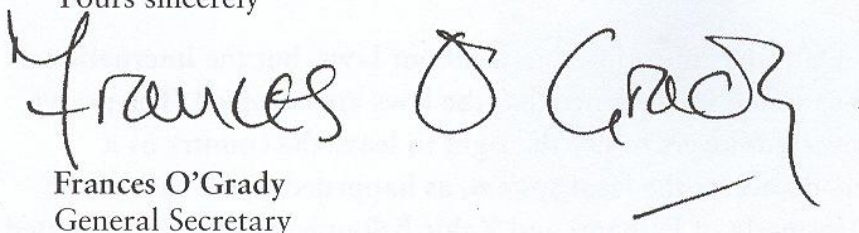
Furthermore, the Emir could greatly increase trust in his government's reforms by allowing migrant workers freedom of association, and to guarantee freedom for researchers travelling to Qatar to investigate and evaluate the conditions faced by the migrant population. The continuing ban on the right of workers to form a union and the secretive approach evidenced by the recent arrest of British researchers Gundeve Ghimire and Krishna Upadhyaya make it impossible for anyone to verify Qatar's claims that it is improving conditions.

Now that British firms will be required by the Modern Slavery Bill to demonstrate what action they have taken to ensure their supply chains are slavery free, they will require open and honest conduct from countries where their supply chains and subcontracting arrangements extend. In addition to helping workers protect themselves, freedom of association remains the best way to ensure that UK companies do not find themselves unwittingly profiting from slavery.

The TUC would also like to see the following action from Qatar: effective grievance procedures for workers; new measures to ensure responsible conduct from recruitment agencies; and a minimum living wage and an end to race-based wage discrimination.

I would be grateful for your help in raising these matters with the Emir and look forward to hearing about any progress you are able to make on these issues.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Frances O'Grady'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Frances O'Grady
General Secretary

This letter has been released to the British media.