

July 27, 2015

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chairman, Subcommittee on Consumer Protection,
Product Safety, INS & Data Security
Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Moran:

I have followed with great interest the congressional hearing on “Examining the Governance and Integrity of International Soccer,” held by the Subcommittee on Consumer Protection on July 15. I believe we would both agree that international sports events such as the World Cup provide a unique opportunity to build bridges between nations and unite people from different cultural backgrounds.

This perhaps explains why Qatar has been so keen on hosting the first World Cup in the Middle East. In a region that has endured much conflict and human suffering, such events can bring together millions of people in the spirit of peace, joy and unity.

The hearing addressed “concerns about labor conditions of workers in Qatar.” I believe this is a primary concern not only for Americans, but for Qataris as well. Over the past years, we have taken elaborate measures to address this issue, including:

- setting up an electronic wage payment system;
- introducing a new system to facilitate registration of workers' complaint, in seven languages;
- increasing the number of work-site and residence inspectors;
- shutting down over forty worksites for violations of summer outdoor labor restrictions;
- substantially raising the fines for companies that violate labor laws and regulations;
- blacklisting companies that failed to meet our standards;
- building new labor accommodations and facilities that meet international standards.

These changes have been made in coordination with international agencies and non-governmental organizations, including Amnesty International. In fact, Amnesty’s recent report on labor conditions in Qatar (issued May 2015) recognizes some of the positive steps taken by the Qatar 2022 Supreme Committee, including electronic payment reform, or “wage protection

system”, and measures to ensure the regular payment of workers, to make it easier for workers to obtain an exit permit or change jobs, and to prevent passport confiscations.

However, the report still falls short of recognizing other positive measures, such as those outlined above. It also fails to notice that a significant percentage of foreign workers are in fact the victims of unscrupulous employment and loan agents in their home countries. Those agents provide prospective workers with phony contracts with high registration fees, or “placement services.” Unable to pay the fees, the workers are then offered predatory loans at exorbitantly high interest rate, thus arriving in Qatar with heavy debts. The Government of Qatar has devoted considerable efforts to tackling this specific issue, whether by blacklisting local companies that do business with such agencies, or by pressing source countries to crack down on illegal recruiters and corrupt loan agents.

Guest workers provide a valuable service to our country, and we are deeply grateful to those men and women who are helping us build it. These workers are also equally valuable to their home countries. In a world defined by fast-growing demographic and economic disparities, the movement of people across borders in search for better opportunities is neither new nor unique to Qatar. Labor migration is a global phenomenon that offers reciprocal benefits to countries whose economy is dependent on imported labor, and those relying on exporting labor and financial remittances. Over the past year, guest workers in Qatar have sent more than \$14 billion in remittances to support 1.3 million families in six source countries: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

Studies have shown how returning migrants from the United States boost middle class in neighboring countries like Mexico. A comparative data shows, for example, that the bulk of India's remittances, the highest in the world at roughly \$70 billion, come from Gulf countries such as Qatar, and Western countries such as the United States. Almost half of all remittances received by India, more than \$32 billion, come from the Gulf States. One can only imagine the economic impact of such returns on poorer countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.

Yet economy is but one aspect of a complex set of issues related to immigration in Qatar, where immigrants make up a considerable share of the population. There has been an ongoing debate over the far-reaching ramifications of immigration on the very fabric of our society. A similar debate is taking place in the United States as policymakers continue grapple with the grave challenges posed by immigration. I think we would both agree that an open debate on immigration reforms is essential to both countries.

Which brings me to the widely discussed *Kefala* system. Initially, the system was set up to provide legal protections and social services for guest workers, including free housing, accommodation and healthcare. Yet the system has had its flaws and shortcomings, and efforts are underway to replace it with a new contract system that meets international standards.

Qatar has been a strategic U.S. ally for over four decades. Our cooperation has taken place on various fronts, including energy development, private sector investment, higher education, and

military cooperation. The strength of our partnership was best manifest in H.H. the Emir's meeting with President Obama last February, followed by the Camp David Summit in May.

The 2022 World Cup provides a new opportunity to further enhance our bilateral relationship. U.S. firms have won most of the competitions for Qatar's infrastructure projects, which involves the development and building of an international airport, a rail system, roads, ports and stadiums. This fits in with our conviction, as articulated by H.H. the Emir, that Qatar 2022 World Cup will be one of the best tournaments in soccer history.

The story of Qatar 2022, Senator Moran, is far from complete, and I would be very pleased to meet with you to further discuss it.

Sincerely,

Mohammed Jaham Al-Kuwari
Ambassador of the State of Qatar

cc: The Honorable Richard Blumenthal

July 27, 2015

The Honorable Sherrod Brown
Senator from the State of Ohio
The Honorable Elizabeth Warren
Senator from the State of Massachusetts
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Brown and Senator Warren:

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding your letter to FIFA President Sepp Blatter, dated July 16, 2015. While the letter has not been addressed to Qatar as such, I find it necessary to share with you my thoughts that I hope will clarify our position. I am especially concerned with what the letter refers to as Qatar's "corruption and the inhumane treatment of workers".

While it demonstrates a genuine concern for foreign workers in Qatar, this statement, I am afraid, misrepresents the facts on the ground. First, it misstates, probably under the sway of widely circulated allegations in the media, mortality projections among foreign workers in Qatar. As the Qatari ambassador to Washington, I can assure you that after nearly five million work-hours on World Cup construction sites, not a single work-related fatality has been registered. Your source is simply based on the fallacy that every death among foreign workers is a work-related one.

Second, the letter, in the absence of any concrete evidence, accuses Qatar of corruption during the bidding process. This is despite the fact that of the recently disclosed cases of corruption by officials connected with FIFA, none has been related to Qatar. In fact, last year, a FIFA-commissioned investigation known as the Garcia Report cleared Qatar of any such allegations. We have fully cooperated with the investigation team, and we welcome any further inquiry.

Third, the letter states that "Qatari officials issued a number of reform proposals in May 2014, but, to date, none of them have been implemented." Despite its genuine concern for reforms, this statement does not account for the fact that, over the past year, the State of Qatar has taken elaborate measures to address this issue, including:

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- substantially raising the fines for companies that violate labor laws and regulations;
- blacklisting companies that failed to meet our standards;
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Which brings me to the *Kafala* sponsorship system that you mention in your letter. Initially, the system was set up to provide legal protections and social services for guest workers, including free housing, accommodation and healthcare. Yet the system has had its flaws and shortcomings, and efforts are underway to replace it with a new contract system that meets international standards. What the letter does not mention, however, is that the system has come under scrutiny not only from international organizations, but from the Qatari government itself.

The letter also fails to take note that a significant percentage of foreign workers are in fact the victims of unscrupulous employment and loan agents in their home countries. Those agents provide prospective workers with phony contracts with high registration fees, or “placement services.” Unable to pay the fees, the workers are then offered predatory loans at exorbitantly high interest rate, thus arriving in Qatar with heavy debts. The Government of Qatar has devoted considerable efforts to tackling this specific issue, whether by blacklisting local companies that do business with such agencies, or by pressing source countries to crack down on illegal recruiters and corrupt loan agents.

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Qatar has been a strategic U.S. ally for more than four decades. Our cooperation has taken place on multiple fronts, including energy development, private sector investment, higher education, and military cooperation. The strength of our partnership was best manifest in H.H. the Emir's meeting with President Obama last February, followed by the Camp David Summit in May.

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On this occasion, Senators, and on behalf of the State of Qatar, I would like to extend my cordial invitation to you to visit our capital Doha and share with us the true story of Qatar 2022.

Sincerely,

Mohammed Jaham Al-Kuwari
Ambassador of the State of Qatar