

Migrant workers starve as defiant Qatar continues exploitation: HRW

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Wage abuses have been further exacerbated since the outbreak of the coronavirus. Some employers used the pandemic as a pretext to withhold wages or refuse to pay outstanding wages to workers who are detained and forcibly repatriated. Some workers said they could not even afford to buy food. Others said they went into debt to survive. — Courtesy photo

Saudi Gazette report

BEIRUT — Defiant Qatar continues to exploit its migrant workers despite a series of recent revelations made by a number of global human rights organizations.

In a damning report released on Monday, the Human Rights Watch accused Qatari authorities of turning a blind eye to a number of cases in which Qatari employers withheld wages of poor workers, leaving them to starve.

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“Ten years since Qatar won the right to host the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup 2022, migrant workers are still facing delayed, unpaid, and deducted wages,” said Michael Page, deputy Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch.

“We have heard of workers starving due to delayed wages, indebted workers toiling in Qatar only to get underpaid wages, and workers trapped in abusive working conditions due to fear of retaliation.”

HRW also released a video along with the report containing interviews of more than 93 migrant workers working for more than 60 companies or employers.

Qatar has been dependent on 2 million migrant workers, making up about 95 percent of its total labor force. Many are building or servicing the stadiums, transportation, hotels, and infrastructure for the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2022. While they come to Qatar in hope of stable jobs and incomes, many are instead met with wage abuses that drive them

further into debt and trap them in these jobs with ineffective mechanisms of redress, the report said.

"Independent employers, as well as those operating labor supply companies, frequently delay, withhold, or arbitrarily deduct workers' wages."

Wage abuses have been further exacerbated since the outbreak of the coronavirus. Some employers used the pandemic as a pretext to withhold wages or refuse to pay outstanding wages to workers who are detained and forcibly repatriated. Some workers said they could not even afford to buy food. Others said they went into debt to survive.

"Since the pandemic first appeared in Qatar, these abuses have appeared more frequently," HRW said.

"In the worst cases, workers told HRW that employers simply stopped paying their wages, and they often struggled to feed themselves."

"Taking employers and their companies to the Labor Relations department or the Labor Dispute Resolution Committees is difficult, costly, time-consuming, ineffective, and can often result in retaliation," the watchdog said.

HRW called on Qatar to enact recommendations by the UN's International Labor Organization to lay down prompt payment laws, protect bank accounts and introduce expedited adjudication in cases of non-payment.

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