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FIFA urged to match \$440m World Cup prize money to fund major compensation program for abused migrant workers

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KATHMANDU, May 19: FIFA should earmark at least \$440m to provide remedy for the hundreds of thousands of migrant workers who have suffered human rights abuses in Qatar during preparations for the 2022 World Cup, Amnesty International said in a new report today, six months ahead of the tournament's opening game.

In an open letter accompanying the report, Amnesty International and a coalition of human rights organizations, unions, and fan groups urged FIFA's president Gianni Infantino to work with Qatar to establish a comprehensive

remediation program. As well as providing compensation for all labor abuses related to hosting the tournament in Qatar, they should ensure that abuses are not repeated, both in Qatar and in future tournaments.

To remedy the litany of abuses committed since 2010, when FIFA awarded hosting rights to Qatar without requiring any improvement in labor protections, the organizations called on FIFA to at least match the \$440m it hands out in prize money at the World Cup.

“Given the history of human rights abuses in the country, FIFA knew—or should have known—the obvious risks to workers when it awarded the tournament to Qatar. Despite this, there was not a single mention of workers or human rights in its evaluation of the Qatari bid and no conditions were put in place on labor protections. FIFA has since done far too little to prevent or mitigate those risks,” a statement issued by Amnesty International quotes Amnesty International’s Secretary General Agnès Callamard as saying.

“By turning a blind eye to foreseeable human rights abuses and failing to stop them, FIFA indisputably contributed to the widespread abuse of migrant workers involved in World Cup-related projects in Qatar, far beyond the stadiums and official hotels,” he said.

The sum of \$440 million is likely to be the minimum necessary to cover an array of compensation costs and to support initiatives to protect workers’ rights in the future, Amnesty International has estimated. However, the total sum for reimbursing unpaid wages, the extortionate recruitment fees paid by hundreds of thousands of workers, and compensation for injuries and deaths could end up being higher, and should be evaluated as part of a participatory process with unions, civil society organizations, the International Labor Organization and others.

“While it may be too late to erase the suffering of past abuses, FIFA and Qatar can and should act to provide redress and prevent further abuses from taking place. Providing compensation to workers who gave so much to make the tournament happen, and taking steps to make sure such abuses never happen again, could represent a major turning point in FIFA’s commitment to respect human rights,” Agnès Callamard further said.

As expressed in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and recognized by its own policies, FIFA has a responsibility to remedy human rights abuses it has contributed to. This responsibility should cover not only workers building football-specific facilities such as stadiums and training sites, FIFA-accredited hotels and the broadcast center, but also the services required to operate these facilities. It should also cover those workers involved in building and servicing the transport, accommodation and other infrastructure required to host more than a million visitors expected to travel to Qatar to watch the tournament, said Amnesty International.

Equally, Qatar is also obliged to ensure remedy for every abuse on its territory, whether linked to the World Cup or not. While there has been some progress through both the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy’s initiatives and Qatar’s welcome program of labor reforms, their respective limited scope and weak enforcement have meant that serious human rights abuses persist and migrant workers have had limited access to remedy. Ultimately, abuses suffered by workers over the past decade on all projects needed for this World Cup, have largely remained unaddressed.

“For years, the suffering of those who made this World Cup possible has been brushed under the carpet. It is about time FIFA and Qatar came together to work on a comprehensive remediation programme that puts

workers at its centre and ensures that no harm remains unaddressed," said Agnès Callamard.

"Under international law and by FIFA's own rulebook, both Qatar and FIFA have obligations and responsibilities respectively to prevent human rights abuses and provide remedy to victims. The remediation fund Amnesty International and others are calling for is entirely justifiable given the scale of abuses that have been suffered, and represents a small fraction of the \$6 billion revenues FIFA will make from the tournament."

Amnesty International is calling on FIFA and Qatar to set up a programme with the full participation of workers, trade unions, the International Labor Organization and civil society. They must also learn from the experiences of other remediation programmes, such as the scheme that followed the 2013 Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh, in which more than 1,300 workers lost their lives.

Beyond this tournament, Amnesty International is also calling on FIFA to guarantee that human rights abuses of migrant workers are not repeated, and ensure that the awarding of all future tournaments and events follow a rigorous assessment of risks to human rights along with clear action plans to prevent and mitigate potential abuses identified. New human rights criteria were used in the bidding process for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, but do not appear to have been applied in the decisions to award the 2021 FIFA Club World Cup first to China, then to the United Arab Emirates.

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