



Qatar's Human Rights Record  
in the World's Spotlight

White Paper with Policy Recommendations

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## Table of Contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>Lack of Judicial Independence in an Authoritarian Context .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Migrant Workers Abuse .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>Systematic Violations to Civil and Political Rights .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>VI.</b>	<b>Discrimination and Criminalization Based on Sexual Orientation.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>VII.</b>	<b>Violation of Basic Women’s Rights .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>VIII.</b>	<b>Transnational Repression .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>IX.</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>X.</b>	<b>Policy Recommendations for Qatar’s Government .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>XI.</b>	<b>Take Action .....</b>	<b>21</b>

# **Qatar’s Human Rights Record in the World’s Spotlight**

## **I. Executive Summary**

Qatar, a country ruled by a monarchic authoritarian government, is hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Hosting the top global football tournament is the result of a decade-long project by the government of Qatar to strategically exploit the prestige and popular appeal of sports to grow its global influence, cultivate a favorable image in popular culture, and boost its economy. In 2014, a Qatari official described the World Cup as a catalyst of expedited social progress in the Gulf country.<sup>1</sup> Over the years, Qatari and FIFA officials asserted that Qatar progressed, citing legal reforms on various human rights concerns.

In the years leading up to the World Cup, and in response to intense global pressure, Qatar has in fact dismantled many abusive features of its Kafala labor sponsorship system — traditionally present in Arab Gulf States — that led to egregious human rights violations against migrant workers, including those involved in building the event’s infrastructure. Despite these partial strides, however, reports of abuses against migrant workers persist. Moreover, foreign journalists and whistleblowers calling attention to them have faced retaliation and arbitrary imprisonment.

The government of Qatar continues to curtail freedom of expression while targeting journalists and activists and subjecting them to arbitrary travel bans. As part of a long-standing legal and cultural practice, Qatar has also continued to discriminate against LGBTQI+ persons and women, including through the male guardianship system, the criminalization of same-sex relations, and the criminalization of extramarital relations. Qatar has also aided other authoritarian governments in targeting and deporting dissidents — a form of transnational repression. With judicial independence only on paper, these systematic human rights violations have remained unchecked.

The World Cup provides the international community with the opportunity to use Qatar’s spotlight to raise awareness on the dire human rights situation in the country and to exert pressure on its government to end the persecution of independent journalists and dissidents, to free political prisoners, and to cease abusive practices such as arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, secret trials, solitary confinement, arbitrary travel bans and transnational repression, as well as to enact much-needed reforms.

HRF calls on the government of Qatar to enact reforms further curtailing any actual abuses and potential for abuse resulting from its migrant worker sponsorship, kafala and male guardianship systems. HRF also calls on the government to decriminalize same-sex relations and extramarital

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<sup>1</sup> “2022 World Cup a tool for social progress,” The Peninsula, 23 April 2014, Accessed 18 November 2022, <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/23/04/2014/2022-world-cup-a-tool-for-social-progress>.

sex. Finally, HRF calls on the government of Qatar to enact protections during the event, including allowing the public expression of affection by LGBTQ+ people.

## **II. Introduction**

The World Cup of 2022 is not the first time that the world’s most popular football tournament will be taking place in a country ruled by an authoritarian government. Previous examples include Russia in 2018, Argentina in 1978, and Italy in 1934. The 2022 edition in Qatar, however, has set a number of particularly alarming precedents — from the allegations of corruption and bribery used by the government of Qatar to secure the hosting rights<sup>2</sup> to the refusal to expressly guarantee the safety of LGBTQI+ visitors in contravention of FIFA’s tenets of inclusivity.<sup>3</sup>

Instead of using the hosting of the World Cup to prove its critics wrong, the Qatari government chose to spend a significant amount of resources on sportswashing — a strategy in which authoritarian governments host prestigious sporting events or invest in growing their influence in popular sports to grandstand, obfuscate their human rights abuses, and promote their ideology into popular culture through sports.

Through sportswashing, Qatar’s government has grown its global influence in sports, and the 2022 World Cup represents the crowning piece of a decade-long political project to normalize its government in popular culture. The government has used its warm relations with Western democracies to promote the image of a more progressive country than Saudi Arabia, an attractive tourist destination, and a useful regional diplomatic and security partner. This is the official narrative which the Qatari government seeks to normalize through the platform of the World Cup.

In order to educate the international public and to provide specific policy recommendations for the government of Qatar, this report addresses the following six sets of human rights issues currently present in Qatar: (1) Lack of Judicial Independence in an authoritarian context; (2) Migrant worker abuse; (3) Systematic violations of civil and political rights; (4) Discrimination and criminalization based on sexual orientation; (5) Violation of basic women’s rights; and (6) Transnational repression.

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<sup>2</sup> Panja, Tariq and Kevin Draper, “U.S. Says FIFA Officials Were Bribed to Award World Cups to Russia and Qatar,” *The New York Times*, 6 April 2020, Accessed 18 October 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/sports/soccer/qatar-and-russia-bribery-world-cup-fifa.html>. See also: “Nine FIFA Officials and Five Corporate Executives Indicted for Racketeering Conspiracy and Corruption,” U.S. Department of Justice, 27 May 2015, Accessed 14 November 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/nine-fifa-officials-and-five-corporate-executives-indicted-racketeering-conspiracy-and>.

<sup>3</sup> Harris, Rob, “Qatari Official: Rainbow Flags May Be Taken to Protect Fans,” *AP News*, 1 April 2022, Accessed 14 October 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/business-soccer-sports-lifestyle-middle-east-f03cd08c36dee73b419b2b0e2978fd3f>.

### III. Lack of Judicial Independence in an Authoritarian Context

Qatar is ruled by a fully authoritarian government. The government is monarchic and legally sanctions a fundamentalist version of Islam. In practice, this leads to political control practices typical of authoritarian governments and creates a climate of dire human rights conditions.

Since the late 19th century and into the country's independence from Great Britain in 1971, all political power in Qatar has been held by the Al Thani royal family and is materialized in the absolute authority of the emir or monarch. Qatar introduced partial legislative elections in 2021, but the ability of the partially-democratically-elected Shura Council to effectively exert any checks on the otherwise absolute authority of the emir remains to be tested.<sup>4</sup> Opposition political parties are not allowed in Qatar, and all nongovernmental organizations need permission from the government to operate, and their activities are subject to close monitoring by the government.<sup>5</sup>

In Qatar, the independence of the judiciary is formally enshrined in law but ineffective in practice. Article 2 of Law No. 10 (2003) provides for the creation of the self-governing Supreme Council of the Judiciary to operate separately from the executive branch. The law provides that judges are independent and may be removed only in accordance with the law. The law also states the judges' independence may not be undermined and prohibits interference in matters of justice.<sup>6</sup> Qatar has been praised by the international community for establishing a constitution and strategic frameworks which formally established the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dania Thafer, "Qatar's first elected parliament may have more power than other Persian Gulf legislatures. Here's why." Washington Post, 14 October 2021, Accessed 16 November 2022,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/10/14/qatars-first-elected-parliament-may-have-more-power-than-other-persian-gulf-legislatures-heres-why/>. See also "Qatar emir appoints two women to advisory council after men sweep polls," Reuters, 14 October 2021, Accessed 16 November 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/qatar-emir-appoints-two-women-advisory-council-after-men-sweep-polls-2021-10-14/>; and "History of the Shura Council," Accessed 16 November 2022, <https://www.shura.qa/Pages/About%20Council/History>.

<sup>5</sup> "Freedom in the World 2021: Qatar," Freedom House, Accessed 25 October 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/qatar/freedom-world/2021>. See also "Qatar: Election Law Exposes Discriminatory Citizenship," Human Rights Watch, 9 September 2021, Accessed 12 November 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/09/qatar-election-law-exposes-discriminatory-citizenship>.

<sup>6</sup> "Qatar: Promotion of the Rule of Law and Human Rights," United Nations, Accessed 25 October 2022, <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/blog/portfolio-items/qatar-promotion-and-protection-of-human-rights/>.

<sup>7</sup> "UN Rights Expert Urges Qatar to Seize Opportunity to Reform its Justice System," United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, 27 January 2014, Accessed 25 October 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2014/01/un-rights-expert-urges-qatar-seize-opportunity-reform-its-justice-system>.

However, the emir appoints all judges based on recommendations from the Supreme Council of the Judiciary. These judges serve at the discretion of the emir.<sup>8</sup> In addition, many judges are foreign nationals serving under temporary contracts that are renewed annually.<sup>9</sup> In 2014, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers raised concerns that non-Qatari judges could be dismissed at any time, creating vulnerability to undue political pressure.<sup>10</sup>

Worse, the same 2003 constitution grants Qatar's state security apparatus far-reaching powers of extrajudicial investigations which are not subject to judicial control and only accountable to the emir. In November 2019, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) criticized the government of Qatar's systematic abuse of the State Security Service Law (No. 5 of 2003) which allows for detention without judicial review of individuals for vague offenses deemed to be "harmful to the security and stability of the state and its relationship with other countries."<sup>11</sup> Qatar's state security apparatus has gained control over the judiciary, "which has lost its ability to achieve justice for citizens whose civil and human rights are being violated," according to the Gulf Center for Human Rights.<sup>12</sup>

Other laws such as the Protection of the Community Law (No. 17 of 2002) and the Law on Combatting Terrorism (Law No. 3 of 2004) also give executive power entities such as the Interior Minister sweeping powers of administrative detention outside the judicial system.<sup>13</sup> For example, the Protection of the Community Law gives the Minister of Interior the authority to detain for up to a year anyone deemed to have committed a state security offense. In November 2019, the UNWGAD criticized Qatar's government for systematic abuses of this law, which included indefinite detention of individuals.

Concerns have also been raised regarding bias of the courts. Both women and non-Qatari individuals are reportedly treated unfairly in court proceedings.<sup>14</sup> In particular, migrant workers face obstacles in the Qatari justice system. A lack of clarity on filing a complaint, translation issues, administrative fees, and judge biases all hinder attempts by migrant workers to access justice.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Qatar 2020 Human Rights Report," U.S. Department of State, March 2021, Accessed 12 October 2022, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/QATAR-2020-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> "Freedom in the World 2021: Qatar,"

<sup>10</sup> "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers on her Mission to Qatar," 25 March 2015, Accessed 25 October 2022, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/797647?ln=en>, 11.

<sup>11</sup> "Working Group on Arbitrary Detention: Preliminary Findings from its Visit to Qatar (3-14 November 2019)," United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, 14 November 2019, Accessed 2 November 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2019/11/working-group-arbitrary-detention-preliminary-findings-its-visit-qatar-3-14>.

<sup>12</sup> "Qatar: Continuing Grave Violations of Citizens' Civil and Human Rights," Gulf Centre for Human Rights, 13 March 2022, Accessed 2 November 2022, <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/2968>.

<sup>13</sup> "Working Group on Arbitrary Detention"

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, at 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, at 15.

Migrant workers who are victims of wage theft, debt bondage, and abuse are often subjected to detention and deportation rather than justice.<sup>16</sup> Women who report sexual assault often become the subjects of investigations about their own sexual conduct.<sup>17</sup>

#### IV. Migrant Workers Abuse

##### The Kafala system and deaths of World Cup migrant workers

Qatar is dependent on 1.7 million migrant workers — making up about 90 percent of its total labor force — who are subject to its kafala system.<sup>18</sup> The kafala, or “sponsorship” system, traditionally present in most Arab Gulf States, binds an employee’s immigration status to an individual employer or sponsor who is solely responsible for the employee. This system has historically been rife with exploitation, as it prevented workers from leaving their job or the country without their employer’s permission and offers little legal protections or recourse in the face of abuse by the employer.<sup>19</sup> In 2021, *The Guardian* reported almost 6,500 migrant workers had died in Qatar since 2010 — the year the country was chosen to host the World Cup.<sup>20</sup> Although not disputing the number of deaths, the Qatari government has disputed that all these deaths are the result of the dire working conditions — particularly the extreme heat — to which workers are normally exposed during the summer months, and that the 6,500 number includes migrant workers who died in circumstances and industries unrelated to the construction of Qatar’s World Cup stadiums.<sup>21</sup>

Qatar’s reliance on guest workers swelled in advance of the World Cup. The Qatar population reportedly surged 13.2 percent in the last year, largely due to an influx of guest workers for the

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<sup>16</sup> “The 2022 FIFA World Cup is Less than a Month Away. Qatar’s Supposed Labor Reforms have Done Little to Improve Worker’s Conditions,” Atlantic Council, 25 October 2022, Accessed 31 October 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-2022-fifa-world-cup-is-less-than-a-month-away-qatars-supposed-labor-reforms-have-done-little-to-improve-workers-conditions/>.

<sup>17</sup> Whitehead, Jacob, “Explained: Why Female Fans at Qatar World Cup Risk Prison or Flogging for Reporting Sexual Violence,” *The Athletic*, 21 September 2022, Accessed 17 October 2022, <https://theathletic.com/3583817/2022/09/22/world-cup-sexual-violence/>.

<sup>18</sup> Saul, Derek, “Qatar World Cup Controversy Continues: 60 Migrant Workers Arrested Protesting Dire Conditions,” *Forbes*, 22 August 2022, Accessed 11 October 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dereksaul/2022/08/22/qatar-world-cup-controversy-continues-60-migrant-workers-arrested-protesting-dire-conditions/?sh=2c81a01b62ed>.

<sup>19</sup> Robinson, Kali. “What is the Kafala System?” Council on Foreign Relations, 23 March 2021, Accessed 10 October 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-kafala-system>.

<sup>20</sup> Pattison, Pete and Niamh McIntyre, “Revealed: 6,500 Migrant Workers Have Died in Qatar Since World Cup Awarded,” *The Guardian*, 23 February 2021, Accessed 11 October 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/23/revealed-migrant-worker-deaths-qatar-fifa-world-cup-2022>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. See also Baker, Aryn and Ed Kashi, “Thousands of Migrant Workers Died in Qatar’s Extreme Heat. The World Cup Forced a Reckoning,” *TIME*, 3 November 2022, Accessed 12 November 2022, <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/thousands-migrant-workers-died-qatars-extreme-heat-world-cup-forced-reckoning>; and Aimee Lewis, Pramod Acharya & Sugam Pokharel, “‘Our dreams never came true.’ These men helped build Qatar’s World Cup, now they are struggling to survive,” *CNN*, 21 November 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/17/football/qatar-2022-world-cup-migrant-workers-human-rights-spt-intl>.



World Cup.<sup>22</sup> The guest workers for the World Cup have faced many of the same abuses as other migrant workers in Qatar, including wage theft, appalling living and working conditions, and death.<sup>23</sup> In March 2022, Human Rights Watch (HRW) recorded that several contracting firms in Qatar withheld wages from World Cup laborers for months at a time while the laborers worked in hazardous conditions.<sup>24</sup> In 2021, 37 deaths were recorded among workers directly linked to construction of Qatar’s World Cup stadiums.<sup>25</sup>

In 2022, the Qatar World Cup organizers acknowledged that workers were exploited after Amnesty International (AI) found security guards were working in “forced labor” conditions by exceeding the 60-hour maximum work week and not receiving time off.<sup>26</sup>

### **Qatar’s reforms of the Kafala system**

Following a three-year technical cooperation program with the International Labour Organization (ILO), Qatar enacted reforms easing the most restrictive elements of its kafala system.<sup>27</sup> For example, in 2020, Qatar extended to migrant workers not previously covered by the labor law — including workers in government, oil and gas, agriculture, and domestic work — the rights to terminate a contract before its end, leave the country or change employers without employer permission.<sup>28</sup>

Other reforms in 2020 included setting a minimum wage of 1,000 QAR (274 USD) for workers, including ones not protected by the country’s labor laws. If the employer does not provide adequate food and accommodation, they are required to provide allowances of 300 QAR (82 USD) for food and 500 QAR (137 USD) for accommodations. Qatar also introduced reforms to strengthen protection of domestic workers, a particularly vulnerable group within migrant workers.<sup>29</sup> The amendments to the labor law also impose stricter penalties for employers that fail to pay wages to their employees.<sup>30</sup>

### **Limits of the Reforms**

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<sup>22</sup> Mills, Andrew, “Qatar Population Surges 13.2% in Year Leading Up to World Cup,” Reuters, 9 October 2022, Accessed 11 October 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/qatar-population-surges-132-year-leading-up-world-cup-2022-10-09/>.

<sup>23</sup> “Qatar: Wage Abuses by Firm in World Cup Leadup,” Human Rights Watch, 3 March 2022, Accessed 9 October 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/03/qatar-wage-abuses-firm-world-cup-leadup>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Pattison and McIntyre, “Revealed: 6,500 Migrant Workers have Died in Qatar since World Cup Awarded”

<sup>26</sup> “Qatar World Cup Organizers Admit Workers were Exploited,” ABC News, 6 April 2022, Accessed 9 October 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/Sports/wireStory/qatar-world-cup-organizers-admit-workers-exploited-83922217>.

<sup>27</sup> “Overview of Qatar’s Labour Reforms,” International Labour Organization, Accessed 12 October 2022, [https://www.ilo.org/beirut/countries/qatar/WCMS\\_760466/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/beirut/countries/qatar/WCMS_760466/lang--en/index.htm).

<sup>28</sup> “Report on the Ministry’s Efforts in the Labour Sector 2021,” Qatar Ministry of Labour, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., at 4.

<sup>30</sup> “Qatar Significant Labor and Kafala Reforms,” Human Rights Watch, 24 September 2020, Accessed 12 October 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/24/qatar-significant-labor-and-kafala-reforms>.

While major aspects of the kafala system in Qatar have been legally dismantled, enforcement has been ineffective, and exploitation still exists under the system. Many migrant workers still face challenges in changing jobs, partially due to misinformation on labor mobility, and for fear of retaliation from employers.<sup>31</sup> Employers, rather than the government, are still responsible for applying for, renewing, and canceling the residency and work permits of their workers in the country. If the employer fails to handle these processes, workers can become undocumented and face consequences such as prison time, fines, and deportation.<sup>32</sup>

Enforcement has also been an issue. The process for workers to hold employers accountable for unpaid wages and other abuses is difficult and can result in retaliation from the employer.<sup>33</sup> Migrant workers can also face consequences from the government for speaking up. In August 2022, only three months before the World Cup, Qatari officials arrested at least 60 foreign workers who were protesting having worked for months without pay. Some of these protestors were also deported.<sup>34</sup>

In March 2018, Qatar established the Committees for the Settlement of Labour Disputes to replace the largely ineffective labor courts and to provide better access to justice for migrants. However, reports state the Committees are overwhelmed with cases in the lead up to the World Cup 2022, and that access to justice remains inadequate for migrant workers. With cases frequently taking years to resolve, migrant workers are often left with no choice but to return to their home countries without the pay they worked for.

In October 2022, the Supreme Council of the Judiciary and the Ministry of Labour established a new headquarters for labor dispute resolution committees at the Council's headquarters in Doha. This initiative aims to increase geographical distribution of the committees and speed up the processing of cases, especially around the World Cup 2022.

## **V. Systematic Violations to Civil and Political Rights**

Qatar ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 2018, while rejecting some critical treaty protections including on gender equality, workers' rights to unionize and

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<sup>31</sup> "Overview of Qatar's Labour Reforms"

<sup>32</sup> "Qatar Significant Labor and Kafala Reforms"

<sup>33</sup> "How Can We Work Without Wages? Salary Abuses Facing Migrant Workers Ahead of Qatar's FIFA World Cup 2022," Human Rights Watch, 24 August 2020, Accessed 12 October 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/08/24/how-can-we-work-without-wages/salary-abuses-facing-migrant-workers-ahead-qatars>.

<sup>34</sup> "Qatar Arrests World Cup Workers Who Protested Going Months Without Pay," NBC News, 22 August 2022, Accessed 12 October 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/qatar-arrests-world-cup-workers-protested-going-months-pay-advocacy-gr-rcna44159>.

prohibition of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.<sup>35</sup> Violations of due process and fundamental civil and political rights are systematic and include arrest without a warrant, arbitrary detention, denial of access to a lawyer, enforced disappearance, solitary confinement amounting to torture, coerced confessions, secret trials, and arbitrary and open-ended travel bans.

## **Political prisoners**

Qatar has incarcerated several individuals for having exercised their right to express opinions critical of the government. HRF considers these individuals to be prisoners of conscience or political prisoners.

In July 2022, Abdullah bin Ahmed Bu Matar Al-Mohannadi, Saud bin Khalifa bin Ahmed Al-Thani and Issa Mardi Juhaim Al-Shammari were arrested by the State Security Bureau.<sup>36</sup> They are three activists from the National Campaign for Travel-Banned Citizens, a newly-formed group of Qatari citizens who had been imposed arbitrary travel bans by the government.<sup>37</sup> The Gulf Center for Human Rights linked their arrests to their activism and contact with human rights organizations. Issa Mardi Juhaim Al-Shammari was released without charge in September, but his two colleagues remain arbitrarily detained.<sup>38</sup>

In May 2022, a Qatari criminal court sentenced Hazza and Rashed bin Ali Abu Shurayda al-Marri, two lawyers who are brothers, to life in prison on a series of charges such as contesting laws ratified by the emir and organizing unauthorized public meetings.<sup>39</sup> Hazza was arrested in August 2021 after participating in protests against a new electoral law which excluded members of the marginalized Al Murra tribe from voting or running in the first legislative elections of the Shura Council, and for tweeting a protest video message addressed to the emir. His brother Rashed was arrested the next day. The two brothers were held in solitary confinement for the next seven months, while undergoing interrogation by the state prosecution without their lawyers and tried behind closed doors.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> “Qatar Joins Core Human Rights Treaties But Rejects Major Protections for Women, Migrant Workers,” Human Rights Watch, 25 May 2018, Accessed 2 November 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/25/qatar-joins-core-human-rights-treaties>.

<sup>36</sup> “Qatar: Three of the Founding Members of the National Campaign for Travel-Banned Citizens were Subjected to Enforced Disappearance,” Gulf Centre for Human Rights, 24 July 2022, Accessed 2 November 2022, <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/3074>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> “Qatar: Online Activist Released but Two Colleagues Kept in Arbitrary Detention,” Gulf Centre for Human Rights, 24 September 2022, Accessed 2 November 2022, <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/3124>.

<sup>39</sup> “Qatar: Two Qatari Lawyers Arbitrarily Detained: Hazza bin Ali Abu Shurayda al-Marri, Rashed bin Ali Abu Shurayda al-Marri,” Amnesty International, 30 March 2022, Accessed 24 October 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/5414/2022/en/>.

<sup>40</sup> “Qatar: Further information: Two Qatari Lawyers Handed Life Sentences: Hazza and Rashed bin Ali Abu Shurayda al-Marri,” Amnesty International, 16 May 2022, Accessed 24 October 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/5603/2022/en/>.

In November 2019, Abdullah Ibhais, a Jordanian national and the former media and communications director for Qatar’s 2022 World Cup organizers, the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC), was arrested in retaliation for internally criticizing and opposing his superiors’ attempts to cover up a strike of 5,000 migrant workers who had not received their salaries for months.<sup>41</sup> Abdullah was arbitrarily detained for six weeks and coerced into a confession to trumped-up charges of “misuse of public funds, bribery, collusion to commit bribery, and causing harm to the SC.”<sup>42</sup> He was subsequently sentenced to five years in prison in April 2021. He lost his first appeal in December 2021 and entered a hunger strike. He filed a second appeal, which is currently pending, and has appealed his conviction.<sup>43</sup>

### **Arbitrary and open-ended Travel bans**

Qatar’s State Security Law allows the head of the State Security Bureau, an agency reporting directly to the emir, to impose a travel ban on a person the government deems to have committed offenses against the state without notice or explanation or offering evidence to back the accusations.<sup>44</sup> HRW and the Gulf Center for Human Rights have determined that Qatar’s State Security Bureau is applying travel bans outside of any legal procedure or in defiance of court orders.<sup>45</sup>

Those under travel bans include prominent human rights lawyer and former justice minister Dr. Najeeb Mohammed Al-Nuaimi, businessman Abdullah al-Mohannadi, former civil servant Saud Khalifa al-Thani, and Muhammad al-Sulaiti, a Qatari citizen.<sup>46</sup> Many of them have suffered abusive administrative detention or arbitrary restrictions imposed by the State Security Bureau.

### **Freedom of the Press**

In 2021, Qatar was ranked 128 on the World Press Freedom index, a decrease from the previous year.<sup>47</sup> Most of the public and private media outlets in Qatar are connected to members of the royal family and operate under state censorship and repressive laws that also cause self-censorship. The government of Qatar has cracked down on international journalists attempting to report on migrant labor and human rights abuses in the country.

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<sup>41</sup> Melnæs, Håvard, “The Trial of Abdullah Ibhais,” Josimar, 25 October 2021, Accessed 24 October 2022, <http://josimarfootball.com/the-trial-of-abdullah-ibhais/>.

<sup>42</sup> Qatar: Ensure Fair Trial for Abdullah Ibhais,” Amnesty International, 19 November 2021, Accessed 24 October 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/11/qatar-ensure-fair-trial-for-abdullah-ibhais/>.

<sup>43</sup> “2022 World Cup: Ex-media Officer Loses Qatar Corruption Appeal,” BBC News, 15 December 2021, Accessed 12 November 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-59669307.amp>.

<sup>44</sup> “Qatar: Arbitrary Travel Bans,” Human Rights Watch, 7 February 2022, Accessed 12 November 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/07/qatar-arbitrary-travel-bans>.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> “Qatar,” Reporters Without Borders, Accessed 13 October 2022, <https://rsf.org/en/country/qatar>.

## Self-censorship and retaliation

The internationally recognized media outlet, *Al-Jazeera*, is owned by the Qatari state and partially funded by the government. Because of this, sensitive topics like migrant rights, LGBTQI+ rights, Qatari women's rights, and the Qatari monarchy are rarely raised in Qatari media outlets.

Qatari media that criticizes the government may face retaliation. For example, in November 2016, the government ordered the emirate's two internet service providers to block *Doha News*, a popular English Language news website that frequently covered sensitive topics.<sup>48</sup> Access to the website was restored only in May 2020.<sup>49</sup>

## Repressive laws

In January 2020, the Qatari government introduced amendments to the Penal Code of Qatar to criminalize broadcasting, publishing, and republishing of “rumors or statements or false or malicious news or sensational propaganda” that can harm national interests, incite public opinion, or disturb the social or public order of the state. The amendment, Article 131, employs vague language to allow for an overly broad interpretation of the law, which can restrict freedom of the press.<sup>50</sup> This is similar to Qatar's past use of ambiguity in legislation to crack down on freedom of expression. For example, the 2014 Cybercrime Law in Qatar and other articles in the Penal Code criminalize criticizing the emir, insulting Qatar's flag, defaming religion, and inciting “to overthrow the regime.”<sup>51</sup>

## Crackdown on foreign journalists reporting on migrant labor issues

In the years leading up to the World Cup 2022, the government of Qatar has repeatedly cracked down on foreign journalists attempting to investigate migrant labor issues. In May 2015, Qatari security forces arrested five journalists working for BBC who were on a state-funded trip to report on the status of migrant workers in Qatar in preparation for the World Cup.<sup>52</sup> In November 2021, two Norwegian journalists were detained in Qatar for 36 hours for reporting about migrant rights

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<sup>48</sup> “Qatari News Site Says Website Blocked, Blames State Censorship,” Reuters, 2016 December 1, Accessed 13 October 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/qatar-media-censorship/qatari-news-site-says-website-blocked-blames-state-censorship-idINKBN13Q4E6>.

<sup>49</sup> “Freedom in the World 2022: Qatar,” Freedom House, Accessed 13 October 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/qatar/freedom-world/2022>.

<sup>50</sup> “Qatar: 5-Year Prison Sentence Set for ‘Fake News,’” Human Rights Watch, 22 January 2022, Accessed 13 October 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/22/qatar-5-year-prison-sentence-set-fake-news>.

<sup>51</sup> “Qatar: New Cybercrimes Law Endangers Freedom of Expression,” Amnesty International, 18 September 2014, Accessed 13 October 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/09/qatar-new-cybercrimes-law-endangers-freedom-expression/>.

<sup>52</sup> Lobel, Mark, “Arrested for Reporting on Qatar's World Cup Labourers,” BBC News, 18 May 2015, Accessed 13 October 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32775563>.

abuses in the country. The film they used to document the abuses was destroyed.<sup>53</sup> In the same month, another Norwegian journalist was arrested and placed in solitary confinement for 25 hours.<sup>54</sup>

The government of Qatar has also imposed restrictions on where international media are permitted to photograph and film.<sup>55</sup>

### **Crackdown on migrant worker whistleblowers**

Qatar's government has also sought to silence whistleblowers calling attention to the persistence of brutal conditions for migrant worker conditions. In November 2019, Abdullah Ibhais, a Jordanian national and the former communications director for the SC, was arrested for raising concerns to his superiors about the living and working conditions of 5,000 migrant workers who were striking after not receiving their salaries for months.<sup>56</sup> Abdullah was arbitrarily detained for six weeks and coerced into a confession to trumped-up charges of "misuse of public funds, bribery, collusion to commit bribery, and causing harm to the SC."<sup>57</sup> He was subsequently sentenced to five years in prison and has appealed his conviction.

In May 2021, Malcolm Bidali, a Kenyan security guard and migrant worker rights activist who wrote about Qatar's migrant labor rights abuses under a pseudonym, was arrested by the Qatari authorities. In his essays, Bidali, the co-founder of Migrant Defenders, described his life as a security guard working 12-hour days and sharing a room with six other men in Qatar.<sup>58</sup> When Bidali's writings gained attention on social media, he was subjected to a phishing attack designed to reveal his real identity.<sup>59</sup> In less than a week, he was arrested, interrogated, and sent to solitary confinement on accusations of spreading "false news" and revealing the company's secret information. After 28 days of being in prison, Bidali was released and ordered to pay a fine of

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<sup>53</sup> Henley, Jon, "Norwegian Journalists Reporting on World Cup Workers Arrested in Qatar," *The Guardian*, 24 November 2021, Accessed 13 October 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/24/norwegian-journalists-reporting-labourers-qatar-world-cup-arrested>.

<sup>54</sup> Kunti, Samindra, "Third Norwegian Journalist Detained in Qatar," *Inside World Football*, 30 November 2021, Accessed 13 October 2022, <https://www.insideworldfootball.com/2021/11/30/third-norwegian-journalist-detained-qatar/>.

<sup>55</sup> Das, Shanti, "Qatar World Cup Accused of Imposing 'Chilling' Restrictions on Media," *The Guardian*, 15 October 2022, Accessed 25 October 2022, [https://www.theguardian.com/football/2022/oct/15/qatar-world-cup-tv-reports-restrictions?utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=twitter](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2022/oct/15/qatar-world-cup-tv-reports-restrictions?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter).

<sup>56</sup> Melnæs, Håvard, "The Trial of Abdullah Ibhais," *Josimar*, 25 October 2021, Accessed 24 October 2022, <http://josimarfootball.com/the-trial-of-abdullah-ibhais/>.

<sup>57</sup> Qatar: Ensure Fair Trial for Abdullah Ibhais," *Amnesty International*, 19 November 2021, Accessed 24 October 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/11/qatar-ensure-fair-trial-for-abdullah-ibhais/>.

<sup>58</sup> Shilad, Justin, "As World Cup Nears, Qatar and FIFA Face Fresh Scrutiny on Press Freedom Commitments," *Committee to Protect Journalists*, 27 April 2022, Accessed 13 October 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/04/as-world-cup-nears-qatar-and-fifa-face-fresh-scrutiny-on-press-freedom-commitments/>.

<sup>59</sup> Lynch, James, "Iron Net: Digital Repression in the Middle East and North Africa," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, June 2022, Accessed 24 October 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Iron-net-Digital-repression-in-the-Middle-East-and-North-Africa.pdf>.



6,868 USD. He remained under the Qatari authority's radar following his release, prompting him to leave Qatar and return to Kenya.<sup>60</sup>

In June 2022, a Kenyan migrant worker identified as Geoffrey, who worked as a security guard and safety inspector at Qatar World Cup stadiums was arrested, was held in solitary detention for eight days and deported in retaliation for his advocacy for better conditions for migrant workers.<sup>61</sup>

## **VI. Discrimination and Criminalization Based on Sexual Orientation**

While Qatar's government has publicly claimed it will promote tolerance and inclusivity at the World Cup 2022, recent actions have shown a lack of proactive efforts to protect LGBTIQ+ persons at the event.

Qatar's penal code criminalizes same-sex conduct between males, extramarital sex, and adultery.<sup>62</sup> This includes a wide range of activities deemed to be sexual, including "leading, instigating or seducing a male by in any way to commit sodomy or dissipation" or "immoral actions."<sup>63</sup> In 2021, HRW reported on a Qatari man, identified as Mohamed, who was arrested in 2014 for reported same-sex conduct. Mohamed was kept in detention for weeks, where he was subjected to verbal and physical abuse, including sexual harassment and the police shaving his head.<sup>64</sup> Another Qatari man, identified as Rafiq, confirmed to the Daily Mail in 2021 that the police often would arrest men, detain them for weeks, and shaved their heads just for appearing gay.<sup>65</sup>

The government of Qatar surveils and arrests LGBTIQ+ people based on their online activity.<sup>66</sup> Because of this, LGBTIQ+ people in Qatar have reported a hesitancy to go on online dating apps,

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<sup>60</sup> Shilad, "As World Cup Nears, Qatar and FIFA Face Fresh Scrutiny on Press Freedom Commitments"

<sup>61</sup> Ullah, Areeb, "Qatar World Cup: Kenyan Labour Rights Activist 'Detained and Deported,'" Middle East Eye, 20 October 2022, Accessed 25 October 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/qatar-world-cup-kenya-labour-rights-activist-detained-deported>.

<sup>62</sup> "Law No. 11 of 2004 Issuing the Penal Code 11/2004," United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, Accessed 14 October 2022, [https://adsdatabase.ohchr.org/IssueLibrary/QATAR\\_%20Penal%20Code.pdf](https://adsdatabase.ohchr.org/IssueLibrary/QATAR_%20Penal%20Code.pdf).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., at 59.

<sup>64</sup> Smallens, Yasemin, "LGBT Qataris Call Foul Ahead of 2022 World Cup," Human Rights Watch, 24 November 2021, Accessed 14 October 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/24/lgbt-qataris-call-foul-ahead-2022-world-cup>.

<sup>65</sup> Gallagher, Ian, "My Friends Have Been Locked Up for Weeks and had Their Heads Shaved Just for Looking Like They Might Be Gay': Damning testimonies reveal the truth behind Qatar's expensive PR gloss," 9 October 2021, Accessed 14 October 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10076051/Damning-testimonies-reveal-truth-Qatars-expensive-PR-gloss.html>.

<sup>66</sup> Smallens, Yasemin, "LGBT Qataris Call Foul Ahead of 2022 World Cup"

for fear of discovery by the authorities.<sup>67</sup> LGBTQI+ are targeted in Qatar due to several exemptions in the country's personal data protection laws.<sup>68</sup>

The government of Qatar also censors any content associated with LGBTQI+ rights in media outlets. For example, in 2018 it removed several opinion pieces from Qatar's edition of *The New York Times*.<sup>69</sup>

In 2020, the government of Qatar promised to comply with FIFA's commitment to promoting tolerance and inclusion toward LGBTQI+ persons, including allowing them to raise the rainbow flags in World Cup stadiums.<sup>70</sup> However, human rights groups raised concerns when a Qatari senior official said rainbow flags may be confiscated to protect the fans. The official, Major General Abdulaziz Abdullah Al Ansari stated fans should demonstrate their LGBTQI+ support elsewhere instead of in Qatar, saying it was an insult to the country and its culture.<sup>71</sup>

Others have criticized Qatar for lack of action to ensure protections of LGBTQI+ people, both at FIFA and in the long term. In 2021, a group of 16 international organizations focused on LGBTQI+ rights issued a statement denouncing the lack of progress and proposed an action plan consisting of eight points for the Qatari SC to adopt in order to guarantee the fans' safety. The SC has yet to respond to the statement.<sup>72</sup>

Most recently, FIFA issued a warning statement to World Cup 2022 hotels over discrimination against LGBTQI+ people. Three of the 69 hotels on FIFA's official list of recommended accommodations will deny entry to same-sex couples. 20 other hotels said they would accommodate them as long as they did not publicly show that they were gay.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Gallagher, Ian, "My Friends Have Been Locked Up for Weeks"

<sup>68</sup> "Data Protection and Privacy Laws in MENA: A Case Study of Covid-19 Contact Tracing Apps," SMEX, February 2021, Accessed 14 October 2022, [https://smex.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/210210\\_JoeyShea\\_Report\\_Covid-19ContactTracingApps\\_EN\\_Draft5.pdf](https://smex.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/210210_JoeyShea_Report_Covid-19ContactTracingApps_EN_Draft5.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> "Opinion Pieces Removed from the Qatar Edition of the New York Times," Human Rights Watch, 3 August 2018, Accessed 14 October 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/photo-essay/2018/08/03/opinion-pieces-removed-qatar-edition-new-york-times>.

<sup>70</sup> "2022 World Cup: Qatar to Allow LGBTQ Displays, Rainbow Flags in Stadiums," ESPN, 10 December 2020, Accessed 14 October 2022, <https://www.espn.com/soccer/fifa-world-cup/story/4258559/2022-world-cup-qatar-to-allow-lgbtq-displaysrainbow-flags-in-stadiums>.

<sup>71</sup> Harris, "Qatari Official: Rainbow Flags May Be Taken to Protect Fans"

<sup>72</sup> Crafton, Adam, "World Cup Supreme Committee Accused of Failing to Respond to Requests from LGBTQ+ Organisations," *The Athletic*, 31 March 2022, Accessed 14 October 2022, <https://theathletic.com/news/world-cup-supreme-committee-accused-of-failing-to-respond-to-requests-from-lgbtq-organisations/wtoUOFxkKBHk/>.

<sup>73</sup> "Fifa Issues Warning to Qatar 2022 Hotels Over LGBTQ+ Discrimination," *The Guardian*, 13 May 2022, Accessed 14 October 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2022/may/13/fifa-issues-warning-to-qatar-2022-hotels-over-lgbtq-discrimination>.



The criminalization and prosecution of LGBTQI+ persons, the hostile environment against LGBTQI+ rights, and the heightened surveillance<sup>74</sup> at the World Cup 2022 may lead to abuses against LGBTQI+ persons during the event. With the heightened surveillance and government tracking of online activity, there is also the possibility that the government of Qatar may persecute Qatari individuals, either during or after the event, for having expressed their sexual identity at the event.

## **VII. Violation of Basic Women’s Rights**

### **Male guardianship**

Despite some recent legal reforms, women in Qatar continue to face severe restrictions and a culture of discrimination both arising from religious practice and formal laws, as they do in other Gulf countries, including Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. For example, women require permission from their male guardians for a myriad of activities, such as being able to marry, travel abroad on a government scholarship, work in a government position, rent an apartment on their own, book a room in a hotel, attend a concert, or enter a bar that serves alcohol.<sup>75</sup>

In 2020, Qatar lifted the requirement for male guardian approval for a woman to get a driving license. However, the culture of discrimination persists. For example, HRW reported in 2021 that women in Qatar were still being blocked by their male guardians and by traffic services from obtaining a driving license.<sup>76</sup>

Qatar’s laws also enforce discrimination against women in marriage, divorce, and inheritance. In 2018, Qatar introduced a permanent residency law that allows foreign husbands of Qatari women and their children to acquire permanent residence status. However, it still does not allow the foreign husbands and children to obtain citizenship the way the foreign wives and children of Qatari men can.<sup>77</sup>

The World Cup 2022 has provided opportunity to empower women in Qatar. Concerns over women’s rights in the country has pressured Qatar to take some steps in including women. For

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<sup>74</sup> Khabbachi, Soufiane, “Morocco is Lending Police and Spies to Help Qatar Manage Security at the 2022 World Cup,” *The Africa Report*, 6 June 2022, Accessed 15 October 2022, <https://www.theafricareport.com/210996/morocco-is-lending-police-and-spies-to-help-qatar-manage-security-at-the-2022-world-cup/>.

<sup>75</sup> “‘Everything I Have to Do is Tied to a Man:’ Women and Qatar’s Male Guardianship Rules,” *Human Rights Watch*, March 2021, Accessed 17 October 2022, [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media\\_2021/03/qatar0321\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/03/qatar0321_web_0.pdf), 69.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, at 6.

<sup>77</sup> Begum, Rothna, “Qatar’s Permanent Residency Law a Step Forward but Discrimination Remains,” *Human Rights Watch*, 11 September 2018, Accessed 17 October 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/11/qatars-permanent-residency-law-step-forward-discrimination-remains>.

example, Qatar created a women's national football team in 2010 after announcing its bid for the World Cup 2022.<sup>78</sup> In October 2022, Qatar affirmed that advancement of women is priority for the next decade.<sup>79</sup> Football fans can continue to raise their voices during the World Cup 2022, and after, to ensure Qatar follows through on its promises after the event.

## Reporting sexual assault

Studies have shown that the high influx of people into a country for a sporting event causes a noticeable increase in gender-based violence, including sexual assault, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and intimate partner violence.<sup>80</sup> Certain groups such as migrant women and female domestic workers, are particularly vulnerable.<sup>81</sup> With Qatar's social taboos surrounding sex, its criminalization of premarital sex, and its practice of persecuting those reporting sexual crimes, fans and foreign visitors face the same risk.

In principle, Qatari law criminalizes rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment and enforces penalties of imprisonment and fines, but such crimes are rarely reported in Qatar because of social taboos and the criminalization of premarital sex. If the defendant is Muslim, the offense can carry a prison sentence.<sup>82</sup>

In rare cases where abuse is reported, victims may face discrimination and mistreatment during the process. For example, in 2022, a Mexican woman who worked for the World Cup organizing committee reported being sexually assaulted in Qatar. When she reported the assault, Qatari authorities then opened an investigation into her, demanding a virginity test and accusing her of having an extramarital relationship with the abuser — a crime carrying a 7-year jail term and 100

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<sup>78</sup> Lysa, Charlotte, "FIFA World Cup 2022: Increased Opportunities for Qatar's Women Footballers?" Georgetown University Center for International and Regional Studies, November 2020, Accessed 31 October 2022, <https://cirs.qatar.georgetown.edu/fifa-world-cup-2022-increased-opportunities-qatars-women-footballers/>.

<sup>79</sup> "Qatar Affirms that Advancement of Women is Priority of its Policy," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7 October 2022, Accessed 31 October 2022, <https://www.mofa.gov.qa/en/all-mofa-news/details/1444/03/11/qatar-affirms-that-advancement-of-women-is-priority-of-its-policy>.

<sup>80</sup> Palmer, Catherine, "Violence Against Women and Sport: A Literature Review," End Violence Against Women Coalition, July 2011, Accessed 17 October 2022, [https://www.womensaid.ie/assets/files/pdf/violence\\_against\\_women\\_and\\_sport\\_evaw.pdf](https://www.womensaid.ie/assets/files/pdf/violence_against_women_and_sport_evaw.pdf), 8.

<sup>81</sup> "Qatar 2021 Human Rights Report," U.S. Department of State, 12 April 2022, Accessed 17 October 2022, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/313615\\_QATAR-2021-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/313615_QATAR-2021-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf), 14.

<sup>82</sup> Whitehead, "Explained: Why Female Fans at Qatar World Cup Risk Prison or Flogging for Reporting Sexual Violence" The Athletic, 21 September 2022, Accessed 17 October 2022, <https://theathletic.com/3583817/2022/09/22/world-cup-sexual-violence/>.

lashes.<sup>83</sup> The woman’s Qatari lawyer offered her a way out: marry her attacker. She was eventually able to leave the country.<sup>84</sup>

The World Cup in Qatar is taking place in a country where social taboos surrounding sex may leave the reporting of sexual assault may leave victims with little legal recourse. As a result, foreign female fans may be exposed to similar risks faced by Qatari women and female migrant workers.

## VIII. Transnational Repression

The past ten years have witnessed an alarming increase in cases of transnational repression, where authoritarian governments have adopted a wide range of measures to target their dissidents, including abusing Interpol’s power by issuing “red notices” to target dissidents abroad.<sup>85</sup> In some cases, authoritarian governments have cooperated with countries hosting dissidents to deport them back to their home countries, where they are likely to face a wide range of violations, including torture.

In July 2022, unknown groups of Qataris suspected to be government agents in Munich, Germany repeatedly attacked Abdullah Al-Maliki, a Qatari human rights defender living in exile in Germany, as he staged a peaceful protest in the Germany city against human rights abuses in Qatar.<sup>86</sup> Al-Maliki fled Qatar in 2016 after suffering persecution from the State Security Bureau — including the one-time revocation of his citizenship — for openly criticizing the government in a 2005 *Al-Jazeera* interview.<sup>87</sup> In March 2022, Al-Maliki was notified that the state security apparatus was charging him with offenses carrying the death penalty such as “publicly challenging

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<sup>83</sup> Linares, Albinson and Noticias Telemundo, “A Mexican Woman Reported an Assault in Qatar. She Faces Jail, 100 Lashes,” NBC News, 23 February 2022, Accessed 17 October 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/mexican-woman-reported-sexual-assault-qatar-faces-jail-100-lashes-rcna17217>.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas, Jake. “World Cup Workers Threatened With 100 Lashes After Sexual Assault in Qatar,” Newsweek, 18 February 2022, Accessed 12 November 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/world-cup-worker-threatened-100-lashes-after-sexual-assault-qatar-1680871>.

<sup>85</sup> Schenkkan, Nate and Isabel Linzer, “Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach: The Global Scale and Scope of Transnational Repression,” Freedom House, January 2021, Accessed 18 October 2022, [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/FH\\_TransnationalRepressionReport2021\\_rev012521\\_web.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/FH_TransnationalRepressionReport2021_rev012521_web.pdf); Bromund, Ted R., and Jonathan Reich, “Abuse of Interpol for Transnational Repression: Assessing the FY22 NDAA’s Provisions for Prevention,” Just Security, 10 November 2021, Accessed 18 October 2022, <https://www.justsecurity.org/79161/abuse-of-interpol-for-transnational-repression-assessing-the-fy22-ndaas-provisions-for-prevention/>.

<sup>86</sup> “Qatar: Targeting of a Peaceful Gathering; A ‘National Campaign for Travel-Banned Citizens’ Established,” Gulf Centre for Human Rights, 15 July 2022, Accessed 2 November 2022, <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/3062>.

<sup>87</sup> Mansour, Ahmed, “Without Limits: Hamad bin Jassim Talks About Strained Relations with Saudi Arabia of the Crisis of Withdrawing Qatari Nationality with Ahmed Mansour,” YouTube video, 46:19, 1 November 2020, Accessed 12 November 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iziwN2KvJTc&amp;t=2330s>.

the emir’s exercise of his powers,” and inciting the overthrow the government in response to his activism in Europe, which also includes peaceful demonstrations in front of Qatari embassies.<sup>88</sup>

In May 2022, the same Qatari criminal court which convicted the al-Marri brothers, also issued heavy prison sentences in absentia against two dissident exiles who had joined the protest against the discriminatory election laws: Mohammed Hamad Mohammed Ftais al-Marri, who received a 15-year prison term, and Mohammed Rashed Hassan Nasser al-Ajami, better known as Mohammed Ibn Al-Dheeb, a former prisoner of conscience<sup>89</sup> and poet, who received a life sentence.<sup>90</sup>

Qatar’s government has assisted other authoritarian governments in targeting dissidents. In May 2017, Qatari authorities arrested Saudi human rights defender Mohammad al-Otaibi at Hamad International Airport, where he was en route to Norway after the Norwegian government granted him asylum.<sup>91</sup> Qatar then forcibly deported Al-Otaibi to Saudi Arabia, in violation of its commitments under the UN Convention Against Torture. Once in Saudi Arabia, Al-Otaibi was sentenced to 14 years in prison for “forming an unlicensed organization” for creating the Union for Human Rights in 2013. Since his sentencing, Al-Otaibi has received additional time on his sentence and inadequate medical treatment while in prison.<sup>92</sup>

Qatar is one of several Arab states that is complicit in the Chinese regime’s transnational repression of Uyghur residents through intimidation, detention, and rendition back to China, where Uyghurs face imprisonment in concentration camps, torture, forced labor, and other abuses.<sup>93</sup> In 2019, a Uyghur man named Ablikim Yusuf was held in Doha’s Hamad International Airport in Qatar under threat of forcible deportation to China. His video detailing his situation went viral, and he was transferred to the United States.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> “Qatar: Human Rights Activist Abdullah Al-Maliki Could Face Death Penalty as Trial Begins,” Gulf Centre for Human Rights, 11 April 2022, Accessed 2 November 2022, <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/2990>.

<sup>89</sup> “Qatar: Further Information: Poet Mohammed al-Ajami Pardoned, Released,” Amnesty International, 29 March 2016, Accessed 24 October 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/3704/2016/en/>.

<sup>90</sup> “Qatari Court Issues Life Term Sentences against Poet Ibn Al-Dheeb, 3 Others who Rejected Elections Law,” Bahrain Mirror, 13 May 2022, Accessed 2 November 2022, <http://bahrainmirror.com/en/news/61533.html>.

<sup>91</sup> “Qatar: Activist at Risk of Torture After Deportation to Saudi Arabia,” Amnesty International, 30 May 2017, Accessed 18 October 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2017/05/qatar-activist-at-risk-of-torture-after-deportation-to-saudi-arabia/>.

<sup>92</sup> “Ongoing Imprisonment of Human Rights Defender Mohammed Al-Otaibi,” Front Line Defenders, 4 February 2021, Accessed 18 October 2022, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/ongoing-imprisonment-human-rights-defender-mohammed-al-otaibi>.

<sup>93</sup> Jardine, Bradley and Lucille Greer, “Beyond Silence: Collaboration Between Arab States and China in the Transnational Repression of Uyghurs,” Uyghur Human Rights Project and Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs, 2022, Accessed 18 October 2022, [https://uhrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/MENA-Report-Formatted\\_PI\\_2022-03-23.pdf](https://uhrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/MENA-Report-Formatted_PI_2022-03-23.pdf)

<sup>94</sup> Rajagopalan, Megha, “A Muslim Man Who Had Faced Deportation to China from Qatar is Now Headed to the US,” BuzzFeed News, 6 August 2019, Accessed 18 October 2022, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/meghara/ablikim-yusuf-uyghur-qatar-china>.

With Qatar's history of aiding other authoritarian governments in transnational repression, there is a risk those regimes will seize the opportunity of the World Cup to target dissidents to their regimes who might attend the event.<sup>95</sup> Qatar's partnership with Interpol and qualifying player nations for security at the World Cup, in addition to its own robust surveillance program, may allow these regimes to target dissidents while in the country.<sup>96</sup>

## **IX. Conclusion**

Qatar's hosting of the FIFA World Cup 2022 has caused justified criticism since its announcement in 2010. The country's poor human rights record and authoritarian government raises ethical concerns about it hosting the event, as well as practical concerns on protecting the anticipated 1.2 million attendees. The country has employed its vast financial resources to prepare to host the event and issued assurances that it will adhere to FIFA's guidelines on tolerance and inclusion. However, Qatar's human rights abuses suggest risk for the attendees of the World Cup 2022 in addition to continuing risks to the population of Qatar.

In the years leading up to the World Cup, migrant workers, who make up the majority of Qatar's population, have been subject to discrimination, forced labor, and abuse, and over six thousand workers have reportedly died. Despite Qatar's positive reforms to the kafala system, there is still exploitation, particularly because of the climate of impunity caused by the authoritarian nature of the Qatari government.

Attempts to report on migrant worker abuses have led to the Government of Qatar to crack down on journalists and activists, in accordance with its restrictive laws on freedom of expression. LGBTQI+ persons and women, both discriminated against under Qatari law, are at particular risk during the World Cup 2022. LGBTQI+ persons who express their sexuality may be targeted by the Government of Qatar, while women will face an uptick in gender-based violence that they, as the victims, may be prosecuted for. Lastly, Qatar's compliance with other authoritarian governments in transnational repression may lead to the government deporting dissidents back to their home countries, if the dissidents travel to Qatar for the event.

Countering the Qatari government's sportswashing should be a top priority for all actors involved in the World Cup 2022. Many celebrities, athletes, and organizations have raised awareness

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<sup>95</sup> Banjo, Georgia, "Autocrats Will Continue to Target Dissidents Abroad," *The Economist*, 8 November 2021, Accessed 18 October 2022, <https://www.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2021/11/08/autocrats-will-continue-to-target-dissidents-abroad>.

<sup>96</sup> "Securing Major Events: INTERPOL Project Extended Beyond 2022 World Cup," INTERPOL, 24 May 2022, Accessed 18 October 2022, <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2022/Securing-major-events-INTERPOL-project-extended-beyond-2022-World-Cup>.

through letters, campaigns, and protests.<sup>97</sup> The international community must continue to keep the pressure on Qatar, even after the event, to push the Government of Qatar to adopt lasting and comprehensive reform.

## **X. Policy Recommendations for Qatar's Government**

On judicial reform:

- Strengthen the self-governing Supreme Judicial Council as a check on the executive branch and end the practice of royal appointments of judges.
- Amend the State Security Service Law (No. 5 of 2003), the Protection of the Community Law (No. 17 of 2002) and the Law on Combatting Terrorism (Law No. 3 of 2004) with a view to define vaguely worded anti-state offenses in line with international norms and create a mechanism of judicial control over the administration detention power of the State Security Bureau, the Minister of the Interior and other executive agencies.
- End systematic violations of due process, including arrests without a warrant, arbitrary detention, coerced confessions, secret trials, deprivation of legal counsel.
- End the punitive imposition of arbitrary and open-ended travel bans.
- Amend the State Security Service Law to subject the State Security Bureau to judicial control and make its powers to impose a travel ban on a person accused of anti-government offenses compliant international law.

On migrant workers:

- Investigate past instances of forced labor and other abuses against migrant workers involved in the construction or preparation for the event.
- Abolish remaining legal aspects of the kafala system that make migrant workers reliant upon the actions of their employer.
- Cease the arrest and deportation of migrant workers who are exploited by their employer.
- Adequately enforce labor reforms to reduce exploitation.
- Adequately investigate and prosecute cases of forced labor.
- Provide financial compensation to migrant workers and their families who suffered death, injury, wage theft, or debt from illegal recruitment fees while involved in the construction or preparation for the event.

On political prisoners:

- Unconditionally free whistleblower Abdullah Ibhais and nullify his conviction
- Unconditionally release activists Abdullah bin Ahmed Bu Matar Al-Mohannadi, and Saud bin Khalifa bin Ahmed Al-Thani from arbitrary detention.

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<sup>97</sup> See "World Cup: Denmark Kit to Protest Qatar's Human Rights Record at 2022 Tournament," ESPN, Accessed 24 October 2022, <https://www.espn.com/soccer/denmark-den/story/4756081/world-cup-denmark-kit-to-protest-qatars-human-rights-record-at-2022-tournament?device=featurephone>.

- Unconditionally release lawyers Hazza and Rashed bin Ali Abu Shurayda al-Marri and overturn or nullify their trumped-up convictions.
- Lift arbitrary and open-ended travel bans imposed on all Qatari citizens and dissidents, including prominent human rights lawyer Dr. Najeeb Mohammed Al-Nuaimi.

On press freedom:

- Allow journalists and media outlets to freely report without fear of arrest, detention, or other forms of retaliation.
- End state censorship on sensitive issues including LGBTQI+ issues.
- Reform Article 131 of the Penal Code of Qatar to stop censorship and persecution of media outlets and journalists.

On freedom of expression:

- Reform Law no. 13 of 2016 on the Protection of Personal Data Stop to stop persecution of activists, journalists, and LGBTQI+ persons.
- Repeal the 2014 Cybercrime Law to protect freedom of expression.

On women's rights:

- Abolish the male guardianship system.
- Enact laws that criminalize gender discrimination, domestic violence and marital rape.
- Amend the personal status law and the permanent residency law to put women on equal footing with men.

On sexual assault and sex crimes:

- Ensure protection of women during the event, including those subjected to sexual assault, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and trafficking.
- Adequately prosecute perpetrators of sexual harassment during the event under Qatar's existing laws.
- Repeal Article 296 to decriminalize consensual extramarital sex.
- Adequately prosecute cases of sexual harassment.

On LGBTQI+ rights:

- Guarantee freedom of expression for LGBTQI+ persons during and after the event.
- Enforce penalties on individuals and companies who discriminate against LGBTQI+ persons during the event.
- Repeal Article 285 of the Penal Code of Qatar to decriminalize same-sex relationships.

On transnational repression:

- Cease collaboration to deport dissidents to countries where the dissident might be subjected to torture.



## XI. Take Action

Qatar's restrictions on civil liberties put both Qatari citizens and foreigners at risk during the FIFA World Cup 2022. HRF recommends the below actions for the public as the tournament unfolds:

### WATCH

- Investigative journalist Pete Pattison's [talk](#) "Slavery's Shadow on Qatar's World Cup" at the 2019 Oslo Freedom Forum
- A [discussion on sportswashing](#) from the 2022 Oslo Freedom Forum featuring former Qatar migrant worker and whistleblower Malcolm Bidali and Lise Klaveness, Norway Football Federation chief.

### LISTEN

- HRF's *Dissidents & Dictators* podcast [episode](#): a conversation between Miguel Delaney, Chief Football Writer of The Independent and Pete Pattison, investigative journalist who reported the exclusive story in The Guardian reporting the deaths of 6,500 migrant workers.

### EXPLORE

- Visit [Cards of Qatar](#) and follow [@CardsofQatar](#) to see the faces and read the stories of some of the migrant workers who have died in Qatar

### SUPPORT

- Learn about the case of [Abdullah Ibhais](#), the jailed whistleblower from the World Cup organizing committee, and amplify calls for his immediate release and the quashing of his trumped-up conviction. Use the hashtag [#AbdullahIbhais](#)
- Support the [#PayUpFIFA](#) campaign - A fund with more than \$400 million to compensate migrant workers and their families

### STAY INFORMED

Follow the coverage of:

- Human rights organizations focused on Qatar
  - Sports & Rights Alliance [@Sports\\_Rights](#)
  - Fair Square [@fairsqprojects](#)
  - Equidem [@EquidemOrg](#)
  - Migrant Rights [@MigrantRights](#)



- Journalists and news outlets reporting about human rights violations in Qatar
  - Miguel Delaney, Chief Football Writer of The Independent [@MiguelDelaney](#)
  - Karim Zidan [@Zidansports](#)
  - Mihir Vasavda [@mihirsv](#)