

Ministry of Labour Response to questions by Amnesty International (letter dated 14 December 2021 regarding [REDACTED])

4 January 2022

The following response is attributable to Qatar's Ministry of Labour

The Ministry of Labour treats the findings of the Amnesty report very seriously and is investigating the company's operations. We urge Amnesty to convince the employees it is in contact with from [REDACTED] to lodge complaints with the Ministry of Labour so that case files can be opened.

When complaints have been received through official channels in the past, the Ministry has taken action to resolve them. [REDACTED] has previously been summoned by the Ministry after complaints were received by some of its employees. Records show that the Ministry has received 56 labour complaints from employees at [REDACTED]. Most complaints were related to vacation allowances and end of service payment. 49 complaints were settled amicably and five complaints were referred to the Labour Dispute Settlement Committees. Two complaints are ongoing.

Employees with grievances are encouraged to lodge a complaint through one of the many available channels. This includes an anonymous 24/7 hotline service (16008), the Amerni app, and 11 self-service machines available in multiple languages throughout the country. Alternatively, they can visit the Labour Department and lodge their complaint in person.

The Ministry aims to settle all disputes within seven days. If the parties do not reach an amicable agreement, or should the employer not be receptive to the settlement, the dispute is referred to the Labour Dispute Settlement Committees. The Committees aim to resolve the dispute within three weeks of the initial hearing and its decisions are immediately enforced.

Initiatives by the Ministry seek to raise awareness of the channels available to employees to lodge complaints, and the Ministry is working to increase the number of Labour Dispute Settlement Committees to better facilitate workers' access to their rights and speed up the litigation process. Over 2,000 labour complaints were received by the Ministry in December 2021 and are now under review.

In June 2020, the Ministry of Labour and the Supreme Judiciary Council (SJC) opened an office to facilitate the implementation of judgements made by Labour Dispute Settlement Committees against companies violating Qatar's Labour Law No (14) of 2004. The office aims to speed up the registration of rulings and appeals, and the implementation of judgements, which can include the seizure of property and assets electronically from companies in violation of the law.

The Labour Inspection Department at the Ministry is responsible for monitoring compliance with the Labour Law. This includes monitoring the legal limits on working hours, and inspectors have the full

authority to enter workplaces without prior notice to examine work practices and accommodation standards. Over 2,900 inspections were carried out by the Ministry in December 2021, and 38 companies received suspensions for violating the Labour Law.

In addition, the Wage Protection System monitors the payment of salaries and protects workers from wage abuse. 96 percent of eligible workers are now covered by the WPS.

With new laws and stricter enforcement measures in place, Qatar is taking a zero-tolerance approach against companies that violate the law. As outlined above, penalties have been imposed on violators and new mechanisms have been introduced to facilitate better access to justice for workers.

Statement by Qatar's Ministry of Labour in response to Amnesty International request

22 March 2022

The following statement is attributable to Qatar's Ministry of Labour:

Qatar investigates all reports of abuse and exploitation in its labour market and is committed to holding unscrupulous employers to account.

National initiatives are in place to raise awareness of Qatar's labour laws and encourage foreign workers to lodge complaints when they suspect a law has been broken. When complaints are received through the proper channels, the Ministry of Labour takes action to resolve them in a timely manner.

While individual cases of wrongdoing need to be dealt with immediately, they do not represent underlying issues with the robust system Qatar has introduced. The prevalence of rule-breaking companies has and will continue to decline as enforcement measures take hold and voluntary compliance increases among employers.

Qatar has repeatedly said that systemic reform is a long-term process and shifting the behaviour of every company takes time. The reality is that no other country has come so far so quickly, but for some the pace of change will never be fast enough.

Every week there are new examples of enforcement in action. Earlier this month, 24 recruitment agencies were shut down and had their licenses revoked for violating Qatar's labour laws, improvements to the Wage Protection System mean that 96 percent of eligible workers are now protected from wage abuse, and companies breaking the law have been publicly 'named and shamed' as a warning to others.

Going forward, Qatar will continue to work with its international partners to build on the progress that has been made and create a legacy that benefits foreign workers in Qatar and across the region.

###