

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: MDE 22/009/2014

19 September 2014

### **Qatar's human rights record marred by discrimination against women, denial of freedom of expression, and exploitation of migrant workers**

#### ***Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on Qatar***

Amnesty International is concerned that foreign migrant workers continue to be exploited and abused by their employers in Qatar. Domestic workers have no legal protection of their labour rights and are barred from lodging complaints against their employers, despite being forced to work excessive hours with no days off. The organization's research reveals that the sponsorship system creates an excessively unequal power relationship between employers and workers, which can amount to forced labour.

Amnesty International welcomes Qatar's acceptance of recommendations to reform both the labour law<sup>1</sup> and the sponsorship law,<sup>2</sup> and, in particular, urges the government to unambiguously abolish the exit permit requirement, which is a violation of the right to freedom of movement by migrant workers.<sup>3</sup>

Although positive steps have been taken to combat discrimination against women and prevent human trafficking, Amnesty International is concerned that women in Qatar still face barriers in exercising their human rights in law, policy and practice. The government has yet to tackle the problem of violence against domestic workers in the home of their employer, to the extent that women who report sexual abuse to the authorities risk being charged with "illicit relations" rather than offered protection.

Amnesty International welcomes Qatar's commitment to criminalizing violence against women<sup>4</sup> and to ensuring that the definition in law of domestic violence is not limited to family members but includes all persons living in the same residence, thereby protecting domestic workers.<sup>5</sup> It is disappointing, however, that recommendations to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and to lift reservations to the Convention were rejected.<sup>6</sup>

Freedom of expression remains strictly controlled in Qatar and individuals face lengthy prison sentences solely for peacefully exercising this right. Amnesty International regrets Qatar's rejection of a recommendation to release all prisoners of conscience, including the poet Mohammed al-Ajami,<sup>7</sup> who is currently serving a 15-year prison sentence for writing and reciting a poem considered critical of the ruling family. It urges the immediate and unconditional release of Mohammed al-Ajami.

Finally, Amnesty International is dismayed that only this week the government has enacted a cybercrimes law which contains provisions that risk further restricting freedom of expression in

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<sup>1</sup> A/HRC/27/15, recommendations 124.59-124.62 (Denmark, Belgium, Italy, Norway)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, recommendations 124.78-124.81 (Spain, Uruguay, Belgium, UK)

<sup>3</sup> Article 13 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country".

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, paragraphs 124.42-43 (Czech Republic, Belgium);

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, paragraph 124.43 (Belgium);

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, paragraphs 124.17 (Ghana), 124.26 (Portugal), 124.37 (France), 124.38 (Mexico)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, para. 125.7 (United States of America).

Qatar. The law should be amended to bring it into line with international human rights law and standards.

**Background**

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Qatar on 19 September 2014 during its 27<sup>th</sup> session. Prior to the adoption of the review outcome, Amnesty International delivered this statement orally.

Amnesty International had earlier submitted information on the situation of human rights in Qatar: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE22/002/2014/en/2d351f00-1076-49a1-a128-06c3280a760e/mde220022014en.pdf>

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