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Qatar: Amnesty International calls for freedom of expression guarantees, and an end to discrimination against women and sexual violence against domestic workers

United Nations Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on Qatar

Amnesty International welcomes Qatar's engagement with the Universal Periodic Review and its support for a number of key recommendations, in particular its support of recommendations to consider ratifying the ICCPR and the ICESCR;¹ Amnesty International urges Qatar to ratify the Covenants without delay and without entering any reservations.

The organization further calls on Qatar to implement key recommendations to lift restrictions on the rights to freedom of opinion and expression and to take steps to promote freedom of the press in all forms of media.² In this regard, it encourages Qatar to repeal provisions that criminalize legitimate forms of freedom of expression, such as those in the Law on Press and Publication that prescribe imprisonment for criticizing the Emir, for writing about the armed forces without permission and for offending divine religions,³ as well as those in the Penal Code that punish blasphemy and consensual "illicit sexual relations".⁴

Amnesty International regrets Qatar's rejection of recommendations to review and repeal laws that discriminate against women.⁵ It calls on Qatar to reconsider these recommendations and to repeal or amend laws on guardianship, which restrict women's freedom of movement or discriminate against them in relation to nationality.

Amnesty International welcomes Qatar's support of recommendations to improve the protection of female domestic workers against violence and sexual abuse.⁶ The organization is concerned, however, that key recommendations to reform legislation on sponsorship have been rejected.⁷

Amnesty International also regrets that Qatar rejected recommendations made by five states to establish an official moratorium on the use of the death penalty with a view to abolishing it,⁸ and calls on the government to urgently reconsider its position on these recommendations.

¹ A/HRC/14/2, paragraph 83, recommendation 1 (Slovenia), 2 (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), 3 (Brazil), 4 (Kazakhstan), 5 (Belarus).

² Ibid, paragraph 85, recommendation 17 (Canada).

³ Law No. 8 of 1979.

⁴ In 2009, at least three people were sentenced to the maximum of seven years' imprisonment for blasphemy and dozens were sentenced to punishments including imprisonment, flogging with 40-100 lashes in the case of Muslims and, additionally, deportation in the case of migrant workers for offences related to consensual "illicit sexual relations".

⁵ A/HRC/14/2, paragraph 85, recommendation 8 (France), 11 (Canada), 12 (Slovenia), 15 (Spain).

⁶ Ibid, paragraph 83, recommendation 31 and 32 (Norway), 56 (Netherlands).

⁷ Ibid, paragraph 85, recommendation 20 (Canada), 21 (UK), 22 (Mexico), 23 (Netherlands), and 24 (France).

⁸ Ibid, paragraph 86, recommendation 7 (Slovenia), 8 (UK), 9 (Norway), 10 (Brazil), 11 (Spain).

Finally, Amnesty International welcomes Qatar's support of the recommendation to continue to ensure fair trials.⁹ In implementing this recommendation, the organization also urges Qatar to ensure an end to the use of arbitrary detention without charge or trial, including in the context of counter-terrorism and public security.¹⁰

Background

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Qatar on 9 June 2010 during the 14th session. Prior to the adoption of the report of the review Amnesty International delivered the oral statement above. Amnesty International also contributed to the information basis for the review through its submission on Qatar: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE22/001/2009/en>

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International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK
www.amnesty.org

⁹ Ibid, paragraph 83, recommendation 37 (Spain).

¹⁰ See Committee against Torture Concluding Observations on Qatar, 18 May 2006, CAT/C/QAT/CO/1 and also the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted in 2006, which states "that effective counter-terrorism measures and the protection of human rights are not conflicting goals, but complementary and mutually reinforcing".