



Kasper Rørsted  
CEO

Cc: William Anderson  
Vice President Social & Environmental Affairs  
Asia Pacific

Adidas

July 1, 2020

Dear Mr Rørsted,

**SUBJECT: QATAR 2022 AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION**

We are writing to you to draw your attention to a matter that we believe will be of great concern to Adidas in its capacity as a FIFA partner, and as an organisation that employs workers in Qatar.

FairSquare Projects is a non-profit organization that works with a range of partners to help prevent human rights abuses. Its team has worked on human rights in the Gulf region for over a decade, with a focus on Qatar and migrant workers' rights.

Earlier this month we wrote to FIFA President Gianni Infantino to request that FIFA take a public and proactive stance on migrant workers' rights in Qatar, and call immediately on the Qatari authorities to enact reforms to protect the lives and fundamental rights of migrant workers, many of whom are in the country as a direct result of FIFA's decision to award the 2022 World Cup to Qatar. The forthcoming presentation of a new UN report on racial discrimination in Qatar only increases the salience of this matter.

In the coming weeks, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Professor Tendayi Achiume, will present a highly significant report during the 44th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, based on her country visit to Qatar in December 2019.<sup>1</sup> We would encourage Adidas to study the report in full, but we have highlighted some key passages here.

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<sup>1</sup> A/HRC/44/57/Add.1 Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance: Visit to Qatar

The Special Rapporteur's report describes how, in Qatar "nationality and national origin entrench de facto castes among non-nationals according to which European, North American, Australian and Arab nationalities systematically enjoy greater human rights protections than South Asian and sub-Saharan African nationalities." She finds that there is a "stratification of quality of life according to nationality and national origin" on a scale that "raises serious concerns of structural racial discrimination against non-nationals in Qatar."

In relation to low-paid migrant workers specifically her report states that the "the indentured or coercive labour conditions" for many migrant workers and language referring to workers who have 'absconded' from their employers "recalls the historical reliance on enslaved and coerced labour in the region."

Based on the limited data that the authorities have made available, we believe it is highly probable that there have been more than 3000 unexplained migrant worker deaths since Qatar won the right to host the World Cup in December 2010. As noted by the Special Rapporteur, the Qatari authorities have failed to act on very clear recommendations in this regard (see para 47 of the report).

The Special Rapporteur's report also notes with concern the government's failure to abolish its kafala system, despite pledges that it would do so (see para 42). An Amnesty International report, published on June 10, 2020, details how 100 migrant workers employed on the construction of the Al-Bayt Stadium went unpaid for seven months and were unable to change jobs in that time due to Qatar's maintenance of its deeply abusive kafala system.<sup>2</sup> Such abuses are not new. They have been repeatedly documented since 2012 and despite some welcome reforms, migrant workers in Qatar are not significantly better protected in 2020 than they were in 2010, when FIFA awarded the right to host the 2022 World Cup.

However the finding that such abuses take place within a context of systematic racial discrimination in Qatar - "a quasi-caste system based on national origin", as the Special Rapporteur describes it, with south Asians and sub-Saharan Africans at the bottom of the racial pecking order - is significant and timely. This report arrives at a critical juncture, when individuals and organisations across the world, including figures and organisations from sport and business, are speaking out against racial discrimination. FIFA has been part of this, issuing a positive statement on June 2, 2020- "say no to racism and any form of discrimination." We have impressed upon FIFA that Qatar is where its influence and responsibilities converge, and where the need for its intervention is particularly urgent.

In June 2019, we wrote to Adidas, drawing your attention to the issue of migrant worker deaths, recognising your work on FIFA's Human Rights Advisory Board, and urging you to publicly call on the Qatari government to publish detailed data on worker deaths since 2013, and to commission an independent investigation into these deaths. In response, Adidas told us that the organisation had, via its membership of FIFA's Human Rights Advisory Board, flagged "the need for greater disclosure and accountability for non-work related deaths, whether or not these are tied to World Cup linked construction sites" and that there had been direct contact with the Qatari authorities "on the importance of capturing and analysing the workers medical data to identify common risks and preventive measures, thereby reducing the incidence of such deaths."

Unfortunately, the Special Rapporteur's report demonstrates that, despite Adidas's efforts in this matter, the situation has not improved and no significant action has been taken to protect workers. We have included an annex to this letter detailing developments in this matter since our previous correspondence.

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<sup>2</sup> Qatar: Migrant workers unpaid for months of work on FIFA World Cup stadium, 11 June 2020, Amnesty International: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/qatar-migrant-workers-unpaid-for-months-fifa-world-cup-stadium/>

Many of the workers being subjected to discriminatory practices in Qatar are there as a direct result of FIFA's decision to award the tournament to Qatar, whether working on stadium or infrastructure construction, or in the hospitality sector. It is unconscionable that FIFA does not know how many migrant workers have died in the ten years since it awarded the World Cup to Qatar, and that thousands of families still do not know how their loved ones died, and have received no compensation. FIFA has said that it is "profoundly saddened by the loss of life of every worker who is in Qatar to help prepare the infrastructure of the FIFA World Cup," yet it has so far been unwilling to call for basic steps to prevent further unnecessary deaths.<sup>3</sup> We have urged FIFA to engage with the Special Rapporteur's report in detail and to make a public call on the Qatari authorities to address the issues in Professor Achiume's report, notably in relation to worker deaths.

We urge you to use your status and influence as a FIFA partner to re-engage with FIFA and the Qatari authorities on this issue, and to do so publicly, impressing upon them the need for immediate action.

Yours sincerely,



Nicholas McGeehan  
Director



James Lynch  
Director

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<sup>3</sup> FIFA's statement on articles published following the publication of the Supreme Committee's Fifth Workers' Welfare Progress Report, 24 March 2020, available at [https://www.business-humanrights.org/sites/default/files/documents/FIFA%20statement%20on%20SC%20WW%20Progress%20report\\_20200326.pdf](https://www.business-humanrights.org/sites/default/files/documents/FIFA%20statement%20on%20SC%20WW%20Progress%20report_20200326.pdf)

## **Annex: Developments in relation to data and research on migrant worker deaths since June 2019**

In July 2019, a peer-reviewed medical journal article written by cardiologists and epidemiologists and based on data on Nepalese worker deaths found the following: “We conclude that the increased cardiovascular mortality during hot periods most likely is due to severe heat stress among these construction workers.”<sup>4</sup> The article criticised the Qatari authorities’ failure to implement “effective heat protection measures”, in line with the assessment made by Human Rights Watch in September 2017.<sup>5</sup>

In October 2019, the Guardian newspaper published ten years of climate data to conclude that “anyone working outdoors [in Qatar] is still being exposed to potentially fatal levels of heat stress between June and September” and that risk levels remained dangerously high at other times of the year.<sup>6</sup> One week later, a report commissioned by the UN International Labour Organization (ILO) Office in Qatar concluded similarly in what it billed as the “largest ever study on the impact of heat stress.” Its key findings were that outdoor workers in Qatar are “at moderate to high risk of heat strain” and that “mere adherence [to Qatari law] is “insufficient.”<sup>7</sup> While the ILO’s press release drew attention to the efforts of the SC to offer better protection from heat on World Cup sites,<sup>8</sup> the report’s findings on the protection afforded to the vast majority of construction workers in Qatar were as damning as the findings of Human Rights Watch, the Guardian and the epidemiologists and cardiologists who drew causal links between a lack of protection from heat and worker deaths in their July 2019 paper.

In summary, there is now consensus among a wide range of experts, based on a body of highly credible research, that Qatar’s laws are seriously inadequate in protecting workers from heat, and there is also strong evidence to suggest that this heat is killing many workers. Because the Qatari authorities continue to refuse to release even basic information, we do not know precisely how many workers are dying and how they are dying. Qatari authorities have not, as far as we know, carried out any investigation into this pattern of worker deaths and they have not made any moves to change the laws that preclude the performance of autopsies.

The very limited information available about deaths in Qatar comes from the Qatari Supreme Committee, who have in recent years published some information about the deaths of workers employed on their projects between 2016 and 2019. In closing, we again share here what we know about these deaths, as this provides some sense of the harsh reality of the concern we are raising. In our assessment these 22 deaths in all probability account for less than 1% of the unexplained death toll of migrant construction workers in Qatar over the same period. Qatari authorities have consistently ignored requests for data on migrant worker deaths and have not published data on migrant worker deaths since 2013.

### **Deaths of “heart failure” or “respiratory failure” recorded by the Supreme Committee**

On 27 April 2016, a 48-year-old Indian “passed away of heart failure due to acute respiratory failure.” On 22 October 2016, a 27-year-old Nepalese “passed away of acute heart failure due to natural causes.” On 1 December 2016, a 26-year-old Ethiopian “passed away due to acute respiratory failure.” On 4 February 2017, a 25-year-old

<sup>4</sup> Pradhan, Kjellstrom et al. “Heat stress impacts on cardiac mortality in Nepalese migrant workers in Qatar,” *Cardiology*, Volume 43, July 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Qatar: Take urgent action to protect construction workers,” September 27, 2017, available online at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/27/qatar-take-urgent-action-protect-construction-workers>

<sup>6</sup> The Guardian, “Revealed: hundreds of migrant workers dying of heat stress in Qatar each year,” October 2, 2019, available online at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/oct/02/revealed-hundreds-of-migrant-workers-dying-of-heat-stress-in-qatar-each-year>

<sup>7</sup> FAME laboratory, University of Thessaly, “Assessment of occupational heat strain and mitigation strategies in Qatar,” October 2019, available online at [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_723545.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_723545.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Study identifies effective mitigation strategies to keep workers safe from heat stress, ILO, 11 October 2019, [https://www.ilo.org/beirut/projects/qatar-office/WCMS\\_723539/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/beirut/projects/qatar-office/WCMS_723539/lang-en/index.htm)

Bangladeshi “passed away due to acute respiratory failure.” On 4 May 2017, a 54-year old Indian “passed away from heart failure due to natural causes.” On 17 July 2017, a 57-year old Indian “passed away in the ambulance due to coronary artery disease due to hyperlipidaemia (cholesterol).” On 15 August 2017, a 56-year old Indian “passed away due to acute heart failure.” On 03 October 2017, a 27-year old Bangladeshi “passed away in the hospital as a result of acute heart failure from coronary insufficiency due to narrowing of the left descending coronary artery by atheroma.” On 25 January 2018, a 42-year old Indian scaffolder “passed away prior to reaching the hospital from heart failure due to hyperthyroidism.” On 9 February 2018, a 48-year old Indian died from “acute cardio - respiratory failure due to natural causes.” On 13 February 2018 a 47-year old Indian died “as a result of the bridging of the left anterior descending coronary artery.” On 14 February 2018 a 32-year old Bangladeshi “passed away from acute respiratory failure.” On 25 May 2018, a 35-year old Nepalese “passed away from acute respiratory failure.” On 2 June 2018, a 49-year old Nepalese died from “acute heart failure from natural causes.” On 16 June 2018, a 36-year old Bangladeshi “passed away from acute respiratory failure.” On 7 August 2018, a 36-year old Bangladeshi “passed away from acute respiratory failure.” On 22 August 2018, a 28-year Bangladeshi died from “acute heart failure as a result of natural causes.” On 26 October 2018, a 26-year old Indian “passed away as a result of acute respiratory failure due to pneumonia”. On 23 February 2019, a 46-year old Turkish man died from “acute heart failure/natural death”. On 23 June 2019, a 27-year old Nepalese died from “acute cardio-respiratory failure due to natural causes”. On 31 October 2019, a 54-year old Indian died from “acute heart failure due to natural causes.” On 27 December 2019, a 21 year old died from “causes yet to be determined”.

<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Source: Supreme Committee Worker Welfare Reports, 2017, 2018 2019 and 2020 available online at <https://www.sc.qa/en/opportunities/workers-welfare/our-commitment/transparency>