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Qatar: Nepali civil society groups urge FIFA president to stop dismissing migrant workers' compensation claims

Over three dozen Nepali civil society organizations have today published an open letter to FIFA President Gianni Infantino calling on him to “stop looking the other way” while migrant workers are denied compensation after having suffered abuses in Qatar.

The organizations have displayed their message on billboards across Kathmandu, including at Tribhuvan International Airport, where workers from Qatar often return without their wages and the bodies of deceased migrant workers are regularly repatriated.

The letter highlights how migrant workers, who have returned to Nepal, are unable to access a compensation fund set up by Qatar in 2018 to reimburse stolen wages, and how bereaved families are unable to receive compensation if the causes of their loved ones' deaths are not investigated.

“We have come together to call on Gianni Infantino to make good on FIFA’s promises to respect workers’ rights and agree to compensate workers who have suffered abuses and families who have lost loved ones,” said Som Prasad Lamichhane, executive director of Pravasi Nepali Coordination Committee (PNCC).

“We know the real human costs of the abuses faced by so many workers in Qatar. Families have spiralled into poverty, children have been taken out of school, and workers forced to migrate again to pay off debts. FIFA cannot be blind to this reality and must act to make things right.”

Around 400,000 workers from Nepal are employed across a range of sectors in Qatar, including playing a huge part in building the vast infrastructure projects required to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

While remittances from working abroad play a major part in Nepal’s economy, those who have travelled to work in the Gulf and elsewhere have regularly suffered a range of labour abuses. Nepali workers typically pay illegal recruitment fees of over \$1,000 to secure their jobs, and human rights organizations have regularly documented cases of forced labour and unpaid wages, including at sites linked to the World Cup.

Workers have also lost lives due to dangerous working conditions, and their deaths have rarely been investigated. A [peer-reviewed study](#) found that the deaths of at least 200 Nepali construction workers could have been prevented between 2009 and 2017 with adequate protection from extreme heat.

In recent years Qatar has introduced a [number of reforms](#) to strengthen labour laws and opened a new visa centre in Nepal aiming to reduce abuses. Despite some progress, abuses persist on a significant scale.

“There is a huge danger that when the final whistle is blown on the World Cup, the contribution and sacrifice of so many migrant workers will be forgotten, and their claims for justice and compensation ignored,” said Nirajan Thapaliya, Director of Amnesty International Nepal.

“If FIFA wants to show respect towards the people who made this tournament possible, Gianni Infantino should finally agree to ensure workers and their families are compensated. Their claims must not be dismissed any longer.”

Since May, a global coalition of human rights organizations, trade unions and fans groups have [called on FIFA and Qatar to set up a remediation programme](#) that would compensate workers and invest in programmes to prevent future abuses. The call has been supported by 12 Football Associations, four FIFA sponsors, [and opinion polls](#) have shown that it is supported by a large majority of the public in 15 countries.

However, FIFA has continued to refuse to compensate workers. On Monday, a coalition of international human rights organizations [criticised FIFA for ‘misleading the world’](#) on workers’ compensation. Despite FIFA officials having said they were working on a plan to ensure workers were compensated, on the eve of the tournament [Gianni Infantino](#) passed the buck and said that anyone who had suffered abuses should simply “contact the relevant authorities to seek due recompense” from Qatar’s existing compensation fund. However, this mechanism remains inaccessible to those who have already left the country, caps the amount that can be paid to each worker, and will not support families of workers whose deaths may have been wrongly attributed to ‘natural causes’ because investigations were not carried out.

The coalition called on Gianni Infantino to use a newly-announced [Legacy Fund](#), to compensate workers and establish an [independent migrant workers’ centre](#) as requested by trade unions such as Building and Wood Workers’ International. The size of the proposed fund is not yet known, and is currently intended to support educational projects and a planned ‘labour excellence hub’.