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**Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media  
Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development**

**Minutes**

**Public hearing on “Sports governance and social rights: the protection of workers’ rights in Qatar”, held in Strasbourg, on Thursday, 13 October 2022**

As a follow up to Resolution 2420 (2022) on “Football governance: business and values” based on the report by Lord George Foulkes (United Kingdom, SOC), the Committees **held** a public hearing with the participation of:

- ✓ **Mr Bjørn Berge**, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe
- ✓ **Mr Alasdair Bell**, Deputy Secretary General of FIFA
- ✓ **Ms Lise Klaveness**, President of the Norwegian Football Federation
- ✓ **Mr Mahmoud Qutub**, Senior Advisor, Office of the Secretary General and Executive Director, Workers’ Welfare & Labour Rights, Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (Qatar)
- ✓ **Mr Dietmar Schäfers**, Deputy President of Building and Wood Workers’ International (BWI)
- ✓ **Mr Max Tunon**, Head of the ILO Office in Doha (Qatar)

**Ms Sayek Böke** (Türkiye, SOC), Chairperson of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, opened the hearing and welcomed the guest speakers. She then gave the floor to the rapporteur for a brief introduction.

**Lord Foulkes**, Rapporteur, thanked FIFA for its contribution to the organisation of the hearing, introduced the main documents and described the aim of the hearing, namely, to discuss the means of action for different stakeholders to improve the protection of all workers in Qatar. He welcomed real advances achieved in the field of labour rights in Qatar. However, the situation of workers remained worrying. The number of tragic accidents continued to run into the hundreds, and thousands of work-related injuries had been recorded since Qatar was chosen to organise the World Cup. The enforcement of rules was not yet sufficiently effective. Workers lacked access to the right of assembly and could not publicly denounce the violations without exposing themselves to the risk of retaliation. The hearing would therefore focus on what could still be done to improve the situation.

Lord Foulkes then introduced the first panellist, Mr Schäfers, Deputy President of BWI. He asked him to evaluate the current situation in Qatar in terms of workers’ rights and which concrete actions the Qatari authorities could take to enhance their protection. He also asked what companies operating in Qatar – including European ones – should do to promote workers’ rights.

**Mr Schäfers** highlighted the key issues of compliance with labour rights by European multinational companies and of labour rights of migrant workers. European companies should lead by example. Since 2013, BWI had been working in Qatar and had managed to conclude an agreement with VINCI on co-operation regarding their recruitment procedure and migrant workers’ rights. Common work had also been conducted with Qatar’s Supreme Committee regarding infrastructures, standards for occupational health and safety, and inspections on the sites. This undertaking was exemplary and enabled various stakeholders to uphold health and security standards. However, this effort had been limited to the World Cup sites. As legislative reforms were ongoing,

<sup>1</sup> The minutes were approved and declassified by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development at its meeting on 2 December 2022 and by the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media at its meeting on 5-6 December 2022.

their enforcement needed major improvements. Qatari authorities should increase checks and the number of staff involved, establish methods and statistics on accidents at work, set up an accessible entity for caring for workers, including migrant workers, and a labour tribunal. In a regional context, Qatar's efforts were more substantial than those of Saudi Arabia or China. Even in Europe the protection of labour rights should be improved. Further progress should therefore be encouraged everywhere.

**Lord Foulkes** asked the next speaker, Mr Qutub, to describe how the work of Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy served as a catalyst for broader reforms in Qatar, and what would be the legacy of those efforts.

**Mr Qutub** explained that the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy had been established to deliver the operations necessary for hosting the World Cup in Qatar and creating a lasting legacy. He then presented the action undertaken since 2014. The aim was to build a sustainable labour rights legacy through the setting of standards, monitoring and enforcement of regulations, due diligence processes, working closely with contractors, exchanging best practices among employers, and providing enabling policies for construction and hospitality sectors. A special compensation programme had been established in 2017, as a remedy for workers and should continue beyond 2022. Moreover, a discussion platform had been created, a joint working group inspection had been carried out in 2018, and medical screening had been made mandatory for all workers. The authorities were still working on implementing medical screenings at visa centres for migrant workers. Managing the exposure of workers to heat was a major issue. Institutional co-operation was established between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Qatari Ministry of Labour, which had led to the adoption of new legislation. For the first time in the World Cup's history, a human rights and labour rights team would be established.

**Lord Foulkes** then invited Mr Tunon, Head of the ILO Office in Doha, to focus on the lessons learned in working with the Qatari authorities, and how those lessons could be used in the region, not the least for the hosting of other major sports events.

**Mr Tunon** confirmed that there had been significant progress in improving workers' rights in Qatar. However, there was still a lot to do, and the World Cup should not be seen as the finishing line. The main issue was significant gaps in implementation of standards. The priorities of the Qatari authorities should be the full implementation of the reform, managing the risk of retaliation (i.e., the threat of expulsion if an employee decided to end his/her contract), providing wage protection and ensuring an acceptable delay in actually receiving one's wage, providing a proper legal framework for domestic work and implementing it uniformly everywhere in Qatar. More time was needed to change the infrastructures and mindsets in Qatar. Even European multinational companies were failing to respect labour rights in Qatar. There was still a segregation in the labour market in Qatar between foreign workers and national workers. However, the Qatari reform could serve as model in the region in that it established new labour rights, dialogue between the government and human rights organisations, including elected migrant workers' representatives, and dealt with the issue of occupational exposure to heat. This reform set a unique dynamic in the region that should be recognised, and the World Cup was the first sporting event leading to a human rights legacy by inducing reforms and anchoring them in long-lasting national strategies.

**Lord Foulkes** welcomed Ms Klaveness, President of the Norwegian Football Federation, noting that she was the first woman elected to the function of president of a football association. He referred to her recent presentation at the FIFA's Congress in Doha, and asked her what she expected from FIFA.

**Ms Klaveness** praised the resolutions of the Parliamentary Assembly on the topic, highlighting persisting difficulties in identifying common values around football across Europe. The topic of gender equality in sports was highly pertinent. Designating Qatar as host country for the World Cup had been a bad decision with bad consequences. PACE had reacted quickly and contested FIFA's decision in 2015. FIFA thereafter had led reforms ("paper reforms") in all national federations, including the Norwegian one. FIFA and Qatar's Supreme Committee had sought to take the criticism into account and to provide for changes. However, on the ground, independent investigations were still lacking, and FIFA should use all its leverage to perpetuate positive changes on the ground. Three priorities for action could be identified for the near future: creating support centres to inform workers about their rights, establishing a compensation fund (which would also cover past abuses), and ensuring adequate protection for LGBTQI+ people. It was crucial to ensure that universal human rights would be guaranteed for all during major sport tournaments and that there would be online platforms to signal any alleged abuses.

**Lord Foulkes** appreciated the changes in FIFA's administration. He referred to PACE Resolution 2420 (2022) and the calls on FIFA for the establishment of a more severe assessment of the respect of human rights in the bidding process. Then, he asked Mr Bell to respond to the various points raised by the previous speaker.

**Mr Bell** described FIFA's efforts to integrate human rights into its work. This effort had begun in 2016 with the addition of human rights considerations into FIFA's Statute, followed by the adoption of FIFA's first human

rights policy in 2017. Since 2019, FIFA had required countries hosting its events to honour human rights commitments and conducted its own assessments on transparency, press freedom and security conditions in host countries. FIFA's "external pressure" contributed to the changes in legal and public policies in Qatar. In order for those changes to remain in place after the World Cup and to spread wider across the country and the region, it was necessary to build stronger relationships with the ILO, to ensure that migrant workers' information centres would remain in place, and to seek further improvement in structures, rules, and governance. FIFA had become a sports organisation with human rights statutory commitments that were indeed implemented.

**Lord Foulkes** invited Mr Berge, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, to present his contribution on how international organisations could promote values through major sports events.

**Mr Berge** congratulated FIFA for its transparency and openness, highlighting its leading role, together with the ILO and NGOs, in improving the human rights situation in Qatar. However, despite multilateral efforts, the situation of workers remained a cause of concern given high numbers of fatal accidents and occupational injuries in Qatar. Further reforms were needed to consolidate progress and ensure that all economic actors in the country complied with the new rules and standards. The problem of unpaid wages and pay delays should be resolved. Moreover, broader human rights compliance should be better ensured by the Qatari authorities. This meant going further than workers' rights and supplementing the current legislation. Human rights compliance and respect for ILO standards should be a prerequisite for organising major sports events. The Council of Europe had a major role in assisting and providing advice to governments and sports organisations, including by adopting the new strategy for sports 2022-2025. FIFA was a strategic partner of the Council of Europe regarding the promotion and implementation of these standards, including through outreach to large multinational enterprises.

- **Questions and remarks by members of the two Committees and the audience**

**Ms Hofstad Helleland** praised the reform steps in Qatar, but remained concerned about insufficient implementation of reforms. Independent assessments had shown that Qatar still did not fulfil standards in terms of human and workers' rights and cautioned against a "sports-washing" of human rights during the World Cup. FIFA should review the conditions host countries have to meet to be designated as such, with a thorough assessment regarding human rights compliance. ILO should further press Qatar on the effective implementation of workers' rights. In order to ensure safety for LGBTQI+ people and athletes during the World Cup in Qatar, one proposal had been to render Qatar's law on homosexuality temporarily inapplicable.

**Ms Marra** asked about the consequences of sickness for migrant workers, wondering if such workers were sent back to their country of origin and if they had access to compensation or their salary.

**Mr Efstathiou** asked if FIFA was ready to adopt a Human Rights Charter for every major international sports event which must be fulfilled in order for a country to be admitted as a candidate host country.

**Mr Triantafyllidis** confronted FIFA and Qatar by asking them to provide evidence of the described improvements. Accountability of commitments was necessary.

**Mr Büchel** drew parallels between the two big upcoming sports events in Qatar and Paris and wondered if both these events would lead to a legacy.

- **Answers by guest speakers**

**Mr Schäfers** explained that the legacy in Paris and Qatar would be different, in particular regarding infrastructures. Sustainability and not destroying the stadiums in the future would be a key priority. However, the practice developed could serve a higher standard for the future. Higher democratic standards were key to better compliance with human rights. This was a challenge in Gulf States. In the future, there could be a procedure starting with a country's candidate status which would then be followed by scrutiny of compliance with fundamental rights standards before any decision to award the organisation of a global sports event could be taken. Whilst the Europeans took the view that improvements in Qatar were still insufficient, progress made from the Qatari point of view was already substantial.

**Mr Qutub** agreed that his country's efforts were the first steps of a long journey. However, Qatar had demonstrated will and determination to persevere with reforms, including as regards the unprecedented close collaboration with private sector enterprises and enhanced transparency. Qatar's efforts had helped clarify the ambition for the organisation of big sports event in Qatar, in the region and worldwide. Awareness, the establishment of co-operation between stakeholders and monitoring were crucial. Wide support of such efforts was needed. An important step was taken regarding the comprehensive medical examination and integrated medical system, with the costs being covered by Qatar. In case of sickness, no one was ever demobilised or

sent back home; sick workers were reassigned to another role on the construction sites and provided with the appropriate medical treatment.

**Mr Tunon** thought the ILO's report had highlighted the progress that had been made, even though shortcomings were still identified. Complaints were submitted in small numbers; however, this situation could be due to the fear of intimidation or retaliation. Progress achieved should be recognised and put into the perspective of the regional context and the low starting point in Qatar. Beyond the World Cup, the change should continue since the reforms were implemented as part of the national agenda and the government had officially requested for the ILO to open a permanent office in Qatar. Individual States were also involved in bilateral communication and exchange of expertise with Qatar, including France.

**Ms Klaveness** addressed once more the issue of criminalisation of LGBTQI+ people in Qatar. This problem should be discussed further and adequate solutions should be found. International sports events should not take place in countries where all participants could not feel safe, and if they finally did take place, those crucial issues of human security should be specifically tackled.

**Mr Bell** wondered if a universal Charter and the setting of global standards could have led to huge improvements in such a short time in Qatar as the current method did. Sports had a major power to help change mindsets and society.

**Lord Foulkes** closed the exchange of views by underlining the importance of continuous efforts to make progress in the right direction.

**Lord Dundee**, Chairperson of the Committee of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, thanked all the guest speakers and contributors to the discussion. He pointed out that FIFA and sports organisations were expected to act to enhance the protection of human rights, but national decision makers should not remain alongside of the road: they should be proactive and work hand in hand with sports organisations. He then closed the meeting.

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