

Mustafa Qadri

From: INTERNATIONAL MEDIA <INTERNATIONAL.MEDIA@ARAMCO.COM>
Sent: 03 September 2020 17:54
To: Equidem Research
Subject: Re: Equidem Foundation: Request for response regarding cases of labor exploitation in Saudi Aramco



Dear Mustafa Qadri,

Thank you for your correspondence and sharing these critical matters with us. We have looked into your inquiries and wanted to update you on our findings.

Aramco takes the welfare of its employees very seriously. We are committed to providing a safe and respectful working environment for all our employees, partners and the communities in which we operate, and we investigate claims of any violations of our standards.

Aramco has robust HR and Contracting policies and procedures in place to protect its employees and contractors, including timely and fair payment. Having looked into the points raised and based on our existing HR practices, we are confident that it is unlikely any of the individuals being quoted in the report work directly for Aramco.

We also have a duty to work with our contractors to ensure that anyone who works on Aramco projects is treated fairly and compensated appropriately. With this in mind, our commitment to legal and ethical business practices extends to our entire supply chain through a Supplier Code of Conduct which outlines mandatory policies on environmental, health and safety issues, fair trade practices, ethical sourcing and conflicts of interest.

Aramco's internal contractual requirements mandate strict compliance with applicable Labor Laws to protect all parties' interests and rights, including contractor employee's living and working environments.

Our contracts require high standards of safety, health and environment controls which meet industry best practices. Inspections are conducted regularly on contractors' camps that fall within Aramco's operational areas to ensure adherence to HSE measures. We also have in place a strong system that allows contractors to file claims as a result of non-compliance with their contract's terms and conditions. Through our Supplier Help Desk Center and Supplier Service centers, Aramco is able to provide both remote and in-person support. All calls are tracked and monitored until reported issues are resolved and closed.

Our commitment to upholding the highest standards and maintaining a safe and healthy workplace environment means that we continuously review existing practices. Throughout the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we acted swiftly by implementing measures across our operations to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19 and to mitigate the virus's impact on our communities and our business. This includes steps to support contractors' efforts to maintain safe working and living conditions for their employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as promoting awareness and wellbeing through training and regular communication with contractors to ensure awareness and adherence to Aramco and applicable Government requirements.

Additional information on Aramco's support efforts and response to COVID-19 can be found in more detail on a dedicated webpage [here](#) and an official press release [here](#).

We would be happy to continue working with Equidem on any further details or concerns you would like to discuss.

Thank you again for getting in touch with us.

Kind regards,

Media Relations

Aramco

From: Equidem Research <info@equidemresearch.org>

Sent: Friday, August 28, 2020 9:10 AM

To: INTERNATIONAL MEDIA <INTERNATIONAL.MEDIA@ARAMCO.COM>

Subject: Equidem Foundation: Request for response regarding cases of labour exploitation in Saudi Aramco

Impact of coronavirus pandemic on migrant workers in Saudi Arabia

August 28, 2020

Dear Mr. Nasser,

I am writing to you on behalf of Equidem, a not-for-profit charity working to promote human rights and labour rights globally including in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. Equidem has been documenting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant workers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since February this year. During our research we came across individuals employed by your company that we believe are being subjected to labour exploitation. We wish to share our findings with you and seek further information about rights protections for migrant workers and the cases we have documented. Where relevant and appropriate, Equidem would like to publish information provided by the company in a public report of our findings to be published this year.

We recognise the significant challenges faced by your company in the wake of the pandemic, to contain the spread of infection and respect the most fundamental human right, the right to life. The Equidem team is in the process of preparing the report. To accurately reflect the situation of migrant workers in your company, we would like to request your response on the following issues that we have gathered.

1. Termination without notice: A number of respondents told researchers of being fired without observing notice period or putting them on unpaid leave, annual leave or on reduced hours. Some workers were even forced to sign a paper by their employer denouncing their salary.

One of the respondents who worked at Saudi Aramco said that he along with several other workers were fired without providing them their end of service settlement. He told Equidem, "The company did not pay my outstanding salary and other payments when I was fired. I was penniless after the lockdown. Many of my friends also did not receive their end of service settlement. I called the company office several times but each time they refused to pay me. They did not even provide us food. I had to take a loan from my relative and arranged for food. I have gone to bed many nights hungry. Right now, I am staying with a relative. They are taking care of me. I would have died if my friends and relatives had not helped me."

Another respondent said that workers were given a choice to sign a paper saying they were ready to be put on unpaid leave for six months and those workers who did not agree, were fired. He said, "Workers here are not paid since March. The company suggested us to sign a paper which says, "I am ready to stay in unpaid leave for six months". Those who have signed the paper, they are made to just 'sleep' in the camp and those who denied signing the paper, company terminated their contract. I denied signing the paper, therefore, company terminated my contract. There are over 400 workers in my site only whose contract has been terminated by the company like mine."

2. Payment: Many respondents told us they were not paid during the lockdown period. Some of them were not paid despite working regular hours.

Another respondent working at the company said he had not received his salary since March. He said, "I had heard about a policy of Saudi government according to which employer has to pay 60% of salary up to 6 months to those not having work. But my employer has provided no payment since March. We were told that we will be paid 50% of our salary, but we are not paid yet."

A worker told researchers that he did not get paid even after working throughout the lockdown period. He said, "Even though we worked throughout the lockdown, we did not get paid. Even if some workers got paid, they were only paid half. Some of them were even fired without any payment. We are asking for our outstanding salary from the company, but the company is turning a deaf ear on us. All of us are worried about our payment. Many of us do not even have money to buy food."

Another respondent told Equidem, "I worked throughout the lockdown period. The company made us work longer harder hours than before. But when the time came to pay us, they started making excuses of coronavirus. They said the company was at loss and did not pay us."

An Indian national working at Aramco said that workers at the company were compelled to strike after the company did not pay their salary since March. He said, "The workers here have not got any salary from March. According to them the company is at loss. After the lockdown, the company has been continuously firing workers. They did not get salary or end of service settlement. Those of us who are here are all working normal working hours, but the company is still not paying us. This is not right. Today, all of us workers decided to go on a strike. It is the only way we could compel the company to pay us. Abdullah Al Sayed Group's and Aramco's MD came to convince us to not to go on strike. They said everyone will get salary in two days. If we do not get salary then the workers will go on a strike." He added, "There was news of suicide of some workers at another site of the company in Riyadh. All of them were Bengalis. Last year too some workers from Bangladesh committed suicide over salary. Due to the apathy of the company, many families lose their loved ones every year."

An Indian national working at Aramco told us that workers were made false promises about their salaries. He said, "I did not get my salary in the past 5 months. The company did not pay its workers during the lockdown, although the work at the company is still going on. I am working at Aramco's site even today. But the company did not pay us. Three days ago, all of us workers declared a strike, then Aramco officials came to convince the workers. Company officials said that salary will be received by Friday, 21 August, but we did not get anything."

An Indian national working at Aramco site in Dammam said, "The company has not paid me since February. Not only me, the company has not paid any of its workers. We were told that we will get all our payment till Friday (August 21), but when we went to ask for our payment, they again said they will pay us Monday. We are all worried about our payment. We all have families to look after. The company should understand what we workers are going through."

A Nepalese national working at Aramco, said there was 90% salary cut for the period of lockdown. He said, "During the lockdown, I got only 10% of my salary. I have yet to receive 5,000 SAR from the company. They used to pay our salary on time, but it has been 2 years since the company continuously delayed payment. We cannot complain at Aramco even if we do not receive salary since we are outsourced."

3. Unequal wages: Some workers noted there was a significant discrimination in payment made to workers directly hired by the company and those hired through manpower supply companies. One of the respondents told researchers, "I was recruited to Aramco through a manpower supply agency as assistant safety supervisor. The workers supplied to Aramco by his company are those doing pipe maintenance related work. Aramco brings workers from many other supply companies like ours. The workers supplied by other companies to Aramco are provided accommodation and food in the site. The food and accommodation facilities were good. However, there was significant gap in salary between those hired through supply company and those hired directly by Aramco. There are workers working for 20 years whose salary is less than 1,000 Saudi Riyals. I get 1,800 Riyals while the workers hired directly by Aramco get 7,000 Riyals for the same job that I am doing. I can't understand why this happens."

Another respondent said, "There is a difference in salary paid to workers directly hired by Aramco and those hired through other manpower companies. Outsourced workers get 900 to 1,600 Saudi Riyal, but the workers directly hired by Aramco get 3,000 to 4,000 Saudi Riyal."

4. Accommodation: Testimonies from migrant workers also show that the company is continuing to accommodate as many as twelve people in one room. A respondent working at the company said that there were up to twelve people in a single room with no proper health and sanitation in the building. He said, "People do not adhere to social distance rules here. There are 250 people living in a single building. Each room, there are 6 people and 12 people share a single toilet. The toilets are not cleaned every day. There is a lot of dirt lying here. It is also very difficult to cook in such crowded environment. We can go watch TV but, since the halls are crowded, due to fear of getting infected, I avoid those places." A respondent from your company said, "Even at this risky time, there is no adherence to social distancing at the camp. 8 people are living in small rooms. The camp has only one kitchen, due to which there is a lot of difficulty in cooking. There are public toilets at the camp, which many people use."

5. Confiscation of passports: One of the workers working at the company said that he was subjected to physical abuse on multiple occasions. He says the company has confiscated his passport and refuses to give him exit permit. He said, "I was abused physically multiple times during my time at the company. They even threatened me saying they will not pay my salary. The company had kept my passport, due to which I could not run away. My iqama date expired in February. The company did not care to extend my Iqama. I wanted to go home but they did not even give exit permit. The company had confiscated my passport. Even when I asked multiple times, they did not give it back. I got stuck here unwillingly. I have applied to the Embassy to go back home. I even applied for another passport as the company still has my passport."

6. Protection from COVID-19: Our interviews found that respondents were reluctant to visit hospitals afraid that they would be deducted a day's pay for their absence. While medical treatment may be provided free of charge, some migrant workers are not aware of this or how they can access testing or care. Some workers said they were unable to access free medical services because the company refused to renew their iqama. One of the respondents working at your company said that he is unable to access free health care services after his iqama expired and the company refused to renew it since. He said, "I do not have access to free health services. As my iqama has already expired, my health card also does not work. We have requested the company to renew our iqama, but they ignore us. I face a lot of difficulties in getting treatment. I have to spend my own money to get health check-up. Upon that, they even deduct our salary if we have to take a sick leave."

Another respondent said: "My iqama has expired. The people of the company are not providing us medical facilities, nor are they renewing iqama. Treatment is very expensive here. This is why many of us do not go to see a doctor even at the very last stage. Upon that, there is discrimination against migrant workers. They are not treated with respect or care at the hospitals. The company also reduces 100-300 Riyal if anyone takes sick leave."

One of the workers from the company said that it was difficult for him to access health care facilities after his iqama expired six months ago. He told researchers, "It has been six months since my iqama expired. The company has not renewed it yet. It has created a lot of difficulty for me to get medical treatment. When I am not feeling well, I have to get medicine with my own money. The company also reduces same day's salary if the workers take sick leave."

An Indian national working at Aramco said the company did not renew his iqama even after requesting his supervisor multiple times. He said, "My iqama expired early January this year. I requested the people at the company to renew my iqama but they did not care. There are hundreds of workers who do not have iqama at the company. This has put us in risk. We are not able to go to hospitals because we do not have iqama."

An Indian national working at Aramco said, "Many workers in the company do not have iqama. My iqama too expired 7 months ago. Due to this, me along with hundreds of other workers are not able to go to hospital. We buy simple medicine like paracetamol from local pharmacy and call it a day. We do not get real treatment at the company. They are doing nothing to help workers in such situation. Even when we ask them to renew our iqama, they ignore us."

Another respondent told Equidem that the company did not provide him with any safety equipment at the site. He said, "The place where I worked was very dangerous. I had to work in the middle of the gas plant, risking my life every day. They did not provide any safety equipment to the workers. I felt that it was affecting my health. But whatever the cause of health problems, we had to spend our own money for treatment as the company refused to renew our iqama. There were many workers in our company who could not access health care facilities because their iqama had expired, and the company had not renewed it."

7. Stress: Stress levels for migrant workers are particularly acute where they are not receiving their full salary because they are then unable to support their families in their country of origin and/or repay the loans that they had to take to secure work abroad in the first place. Some may even need to take out additional loans to meet their subsistence needs while in lockdown.

One of the respondents told researchers that he is struggling to put food on the table after the company fired him. "I have a wife, two children and parents back in India. They are all worried about me and want me to come back home. I am very upset because of how the company treated us during such time of need. It makes me sad to see how my family is worrying about money and struggling to put food on the table. I do not have any money right now and I am already in debt because I lost my job."

One of the respondents told researchers that a Filipino worker resorted to suicide because the company did not pay him. He said, "Workers were in a lot of mental tension after the company denied to pay them. For many workers like me, this job is the only source of livelihood. A Filipino worker, who used to work with me at Aramco committed suicide in the camp where I live, because he did not get paid. Before he committed suicide in the bathroom of the camp, he did a video call to his family in Philippines and showed live video of the incident. I can only imagine what he must have been through. The poor family must be devastated."

One of the workers at the company told Equidem, "I do not have any alternatives to earn money after returning to Nepal. I have to take care of my family on my own. I have been paying 12,000 rupees every month for the education of my children. On top of that I have to arrange paying expenses of my family and living cost. I am in a great tension that how I can arrange that amount. Upon that, the company is denying me tanazul (release letter). My family wants me to come back. I do not know when the company will give me tanazul."

One of the workers at the company told researchers that he and his family can only afford to eat once a day after he lost his job. He said, "My family members have no source of income. I am very sad and upset at the loss of salary. At this time there is no work in my village either. My family members are also very upset. They are eating salt bread once a day because that is all they can afford. I have not sent them any money

in months. My mother's treatment and child's medicine cost a lot. I do not know what to do. I have already borrowed a lot of money from my friends both here and in India. I cannot see my family like this."

One respondent told Equidem: "I am worried about my family. I can barely sleep at night thinking about them. I came to Saudi so that I could save money for my son's treatment. He was sick even before I came to Saudi. Doctor says he has to take medicine for 5 years continuously. He is just 3 years old. The company is asking us to work in such risky time but not paying us. My whole life has turned upside down. I have not sent money in 5 months. My wife sold her jewelry to buy medicine. I am desperate and there is nothing I can do to help my family."

With that background, we specifically would like to know if the company is aware of these particular issues included in this letter; about what steps have been taken to address these specific issues; and how many other such issues of human rights abuses is your company aware of.

We would appreciate receiving any information you can provide by Thursday 3rd September 2020 so that we can incorporate your responses in our report. You can send information to Equidem by email at info@equidemresearch.org.

Sincerely,



Mustafa Qadri
Executive Director
Equidem Foundation

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