

European Council Président, H.E. Charles Michel,
European Commission President, H.E. Ursula von der Leyen,
High Representative/Vice President, H.E. Josep Borrell,
EU Special Representative, H.E. Eamon Gilmore,

Brussels, 7 June 2021

Re: Call from Members of the European Parliament to protect migrant workers' rights in Qatar and stop criminalizing Malcolm Bidali and other human rights defenders

We, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, would like to express our deep concerns about the systematic violations of migrant workers' human rights in Qatar and ask you to join our call for Qatar to stop criminalizing human rights defenders and in particular to drop all charges currently held against security guard and workers' rights defender Malcolm Bidali.

The preparation of the 2022 football World Cup has shed a harsh light on the dire situation of migrant workers in Qatar. According to an investigation by The Guardian¹, since Qatar was chosen to host the international competition, more than 6.750 migrant workers have died in the country, many from cardiac and respiratory failures linked with appalling working conditions.

The government of Qatar has recently introduced some legislative measures to supposedly end the “*kafala* system”, but those measures do not challenge the unjustifiable power employers hold over migrant workers' lives. Approximately 2 million migrant workers making up 95% of the total labor force of Qatar are still not allowed to form unions and defend their rights.

While employers hold disproportionate power, workers' rights are poorly protected. According to Amnesty International², migrant workers continue to face widespread passport confiscations, grueling working and living conditions, complete disregard for limits on working hours and frequent verbal and physical abuse. They also face recurring delays and non-payments of wages, putting them and their dependents in precarious situations. Significant barriers to access justice prevent workers from filing claims and lead many claimants to drop their cases without obtaining remedies. Employers are thus rarely held accountable for their actions.

Since his arrival in Qatar three years ago, Malcolm Bidali, a Kenyan security guard and human rights defender, has been on the forefront of migrant workers' struggle for justice. He has documented online rights violations faced by migrant workers daily. In particular, he has shared his experience living in a dark four by four meters room with five colleagues, sharing eight shower cubicles with seventy other workers, working long hours and facing unexplained wage delays and cuts³. Lately, he has collected and published reactions of migrant workers to the new labor laws introduced by Qatar, highlighting loopholes and shortcomings: a priceless work in a country where those voices are usually silenced. A month ago, Malcolm Bidali gave a presentation to a large group of civil society organizations and trade unions about his experience working in Qatar.

¹ [23 February 2021, The Guardian, “Revealed: 6,500 migrant workers have died in Qatar since World Cup awarded”](#)

² [18 November 2020, Reality Check 2020: Countdown To The 2022 World Cup, Migrant Workers' Rights in Qatar”](#)

³ [Posts by Malcolm Bidali under the pseudonym “Noah” on the website on NGO MigrantRights.org](#)

But one week later, on the 4th of May, Malcolm Bidali was forcibly disappeared by the State security service⁴. He has been detained for more than three weeks at an unknown location, without access to a lawyer and is under investigation for alleged “offences related to payments received by a foreign agent for the creation and distribution of disinformation”. The organizations Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, MigrantRights.org, FairSquare and Business & Human Rights Resource Centre are urging the Qatari authorities to drop all charges held against Mr. Bidali, who appears to have been detained and is currently prosecuted for the peaceful exercise of his human rights⁵.

We call on the European Commission, the European Council, and the Member States to urge Qatari authorities to immediately and unconditionally drop all charges held against human rights defender Malcom Bidali, as we believe he is solely being targeted as a result of his peaceful and legitimate human rights work. We call on the European Commission, the European Council, and the Member States to make full use of the tools at their disposal, in compliance with the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders. We also call on them to urge the Qatari authorities to stop criminalizing human rights defenders and to guarantee the full respect of their rights⁶.

We further call on the European Commission, the European Council, and the Member States to urge Qatar to fully recognize and protect migrant workers’ rights, including freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and the right to organize and form unions.

We further call on the European Union and the Member States to uphold the responsibility of European transnational companies that cause, contribute, or are directly linked to human and workers’ rights violations in Qatar, including in the context of the organization of the 2022 World Cup.

We call on FIFA and the European national football federations to adopt human rights policies and to do their utmost to prevent and meaningfully address human rights violations occurring in relation to the organization of the 2022 World Cup.

We stand ready to fully take on this issue as European Parliamentarians, including to call for a resolution from the European Parliament and to invite the High Representative/Vice President to a discussion on the way forward.

Yours sincerely,

Manon Aubry, Member of the European Parliament, Co-chair of The Left
Anne-Sophie Pelletier, Member of the European Parliament, The Left

[Co-signatories (46) are listed on the following page]

⁴ [13 May 2021, Joint press release by Amnesty international, Business and Human Rights Resource Center, FairSquare, Human Rights Watch, MigrantRights.org. “Qatar: Fears grow for forcibly disappeared migrants’ rights activist”](#)

⁵ [30 May 2021, Human Rights Watch. “Qatar: Kenyan Labor Rights Activist in Solitary Confinement, Subjected to Enforced Disappearance, Denied a Lawyer”](#)

⁶ In strict adherence to the conditions set out in the ‘Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment’, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988

Co-signatories :

Manuel Bompard, The Left

Leila Chaibi, The Left

Nikolaj Villumsen, The Left

Idoia Villanueva, The Left

Dietmar Köster, S&D

Karen Melchior, Renew

Terry Reintke, The Greens/EFA

Carles Puigdemont, Non-attached

Cornelia Ernst, The Left

Pascal Durand, Renew

Anne Cavazzini, The Greens/EFA

Sira Rego, The Left

Manu Pineda, The Left

Luke Ming Flanagan, The Left

Helmut Scholz, The Left

Heidi Hautala, The Greens/EFA

Viola Von Cramon-Taubadel, The Greens/EFA

Marie Toussaint, The Greens/EFA

José Gusmão, The Left

Martin Schirdewan, The Left

Mounir Satouri, The Greens/EFA

Aurore Lalucq, S&D

Raphael Glucksmann, S&D

Stelios Kouloglou, The Left

Ville Niinistö, The Greens/EFA

Ernest Urtasun, The Greens/EFA

Marisa Matias, The Left

Petras Auštrevičius, Renew

Dimitros Papadimoulis, The Left

Javier Nart, Renew

Anja Hazekamp, The Left

Damien Carème, The Greens/EFA

Saskia Bricmont, The Greens/EFA

Malin Bjork, The Left

Kostantinos Arvanitis, The Left

Ignazio Corrao, The Greens/EFA

Dorien Rookmaker, Non-attached

Manuela Ripa, The Greens/EFA

Pernando Barrena, The Left

Agnes Jongerius, S&D

Miguel Urban Crespo, The Left

Assita Kanko, ECR

Martina Michels, The Left

Rosa D'Amato, The Greens/EFA

María Eugenia Rodríguez Palop, The Left

Lara Wolters, S&D