

**From:** Spokesperson <Spokesperson@sccm.qa>

**Date:** Thursday, 7 May 2020 at 00:20

**Subject:** Fw: Qatar's Approach: Applying COVID-19 Precautionary Measures while Preserving and Upholding Human Rights

Dear Coalition of Civil Society Organizations and Trade Unions,

In response to the letter dated March 31, 2020, concerning a call from a coalition of civil society organizations and trade unions to ensure that migrant workers receive adequate protection from COVID-19, the State of Qatar appreciates the acknowledgment of the positive measures taken by the government and we welcome the steps outlined to further enhance the protection of workers.

Presiding over a meeting with officials from the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management to combat COVID-19, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani directed officials to ensure the provision of necessary services to all the residents of Qatar with no exceptions. The Supreme Committee for Crisis Management ensures the coordinated implementation of the national executive plan to confront COVID-19 as well as to mitigate its economic and social effects on all residents.

The main priority for Qatar, as stated by His Highness the Amir, is to guarantee the health and safety of all its citizens and residents, including migrant workers, by providing equal services to all. We strive to adhere to the highest international standards in the promotion and protection of human rights, and the principle of non-discrimination in light of the current conditions of the global health crisis represented by the outbreak of COVID-19.

Qatar's COVID-19 measures are in line with World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines and have been recognized by its Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. Qatar has provided transparent information and facts, free checkups, free healthcare, and medical supplies to all citizens and residents without discrimination regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, or residency status. To date, the total number of people tested for COVID-19 is 112,963, the total number of positive cases is 17,972, the number of active cases under treatment is 15,890, the number of recovered patients 2,070, and the total number of deaths is 12.

As highlighted in your letter, part of the Industrial Area, specifically from Street No. 1 to Street No. 32, has been quarantined for a renewed period of two weeks, due to the number of COVID-19 cases in the area. The industrial zone is not only a residential area, but it is also a region that contains a number of factories and commercial facilities. The decision to implement a lockdown on this partial area is linked to medical and technical standards in protection of the residents of the area.

As of the 9th of April, work has begun on the gradual lifting of the lockdown measures of the area in a way that guarantees the safety of residents and the society as a whole, as well as the return of supply chains and life in general to normal operation. This lockdown is not the only one of its kind in the world, and despite its difficulty for all of us, it is a necessary option in light of this crisis. The authorities are trying in various ways to mitigate its consequences, both on the residents of the area and the economy. Now, and as most of the health indicators in the locked down area have reached a point that allows easing the measures, the decision has been made to re-open that part closed part of the Industrial Area from Street One to Street 32. The area will operate under new procedures that reorganize the exit and entry from Wednesday 6 May onward (Please refer to the statement issued on May 6 by the Government Communications Office).

The State of Qatar is doing everything possible to ensure that the needs of the residents of the Industrial Area and all labor accommodation areas are met. Efforts coordinated by the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management ensure that all citizens and residents of Qatar receive the necessary information, have access to treatment through Qatar's medical services, and for those that continue to work, have safe working conditions. Such efforts include:

- **Daily Supplies:** The State of Qatar is ensuring the daily distribution of food, drinks, masks, and hand sanitizers to the residents of the Industrial Area. 1000 trucks laden with goods enter the area on a daily basis.
- **Wage Protection:** The Ministries of Administrative Development, Labour, and Social Affairs and Public Health work in coordination with employers to ensure the daily needs of workers are met, and wages are paid on schedule. The government ensures that migrant workers who are in quarantine or undergoing treatment receive their full salaries. The State of Qatar has allocated three billion riyals (\$824m) to support companies in paying their employees, including migrant workers.
- **Monitoring:** A text hotline service (92727) was launched to receive workers' grievances 24/7. The Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour, and Social Affairs is working 24/7 to conduct worksite checks, enforce the Wage Protection System to monitor companies on a daily basis, check transactions, and communicate directly to the companies who are found to have delayed payments. As of April 1<sup>st</sup>, the hotline received more than 10,000 calls, 1328 complaints, from which 742 have been settled, and 586 are under process.
- **Accessible Healthcare Services:** The Ministry of Public Health has dedicated three health centers in the Industrial Area for the care of patients and their various medical needs beyond COVID-19. In addition, there are three mobile medical units and six dedicated ambulance units for COVID-19 related services to support residents in the Industrial Area. Healthcare services are provided to all residents of Qatar and are accessible at the different labor accommodations across the country. Temporary medical sites are being set up and the capacity reached so far is 12,000 beds; it will reach 14,000 by the end of the month, more could be added as needed. It's worthwhile mentioning that the aforementioned facilities and services are accessible free of charge. The highest consideration has been given to support infection prevention with control practices that meet or exceed international standards. Special measures have also been taken to protect the health and safety of on-site care and support teams, and reduce their risk of exposure to the virus. Fines are applied on those companies that don't comply; an example is attached in the appendix. The sites provide specific programs to improve the quality of life of individuals on the sites, providing medical and nursing care 24/7, with access to pharmacy services, security services, and leisure activities. The sites also guarantee the patients' rights to an appropriate healthy nutrition.
- **Workplace Measures:** The government has issued a set of directives for companies in the private sector. The directives include reducing work hours in the construction sector to six hours daily and increasing awareness of preventive measures, including regular handwashing and avoiding hand to face contact. Companies should also increase the frequency of routine cleaning and sanitation of work sites, accommodation, buses, bathrooms, kitchens, canteens and other places used by workers. Social distancing measures must also be enforced, such as staggering entry and exit of workers to and from their workplace, limiting all bus capacity to a maximum of 50 percent, ensuring masks and hand sanitizers are available at workplaces, limiting numbers at worksites and ensuring the number of people in accommodation rooms is limited to four, and limiting the use of communal areas in line with the guidelines of the

Ministry of Public Health (MOPH). Companies that don't comply subject themselves to fines and legal prosecution.

- **Accessible Information:** The State of Qatar continues to arrange a series of roundtable discussions with labor attachés as well as migrant community leaders, conducted by the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor and Social Affairs, in addition to the close coordination with the embassies by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to spread awareness within the guest communities. The designated ministries are distributing informative handouts on a regular basis in different languages: English, Arabic, Bengali, Urdu, Tagalog, Hindi, Nepali, Malayalam, and Sinhalese. This also includes a national multimedia campaign on social media and radio stations catered to migrant and domestic workers to inform them of their rights. Videos and pamphlets have been produced in different languages to spread awareness about COVID-19, featuring celebrities and influencers representing the different migrant communities to ensure that the information reaches all audiences. The information campaign includes informing employers of the importance of protecting migrant workers and to ensure that domestic workers are provided with protective equipment and that their wages are paid on time through online services. The Ministry of Public Health also established a 24/7 hotline, 16000, for questions and inquiries related to the Coronavirus providing medical and psychological assistance. Plus, the Government Communication Office has introduced a Whatsapp Business service that provides instant updates on the medical status and state measures to tackle the pandemic, which has received over a million inquiries. In addition, the service provides information on how to stay safe based on WHO guidelines. It is available in Arabic, English, Hindi, Nepali and Malayalam.
- **Accessible Communication:** There are 1,692 free ICT facilities in Qatar, set up to cater for the recreational and communication needs of migrant workers. The ICT facilities are located in different parts across the country including the Industrial Area and they are all equipped with free of charge WIFI services, to connect the guest workers with their families.
- **Sterilization:** A sterilization and inspection campaign was conducted in 232 migrant workers' accommodation in various regions of the country. Sanitization ongoing in the Industrial Area includes streets, accommodations, and public places.

Regarding the further steps proposed in the letter:

- The State of Qatar follows a policy of providing free treatment to all individuals infected with COVID-19. Those who do not have valid working visas and are illegal in the country are also being treated free of charge without penalty. Hence, all workers, quarantined or otherwise, are provided with free testing with appropriate medical treatment, and undocumented workers can seek medical treatment without fear of detention.
- The State of Qatar provides separate quarantine facilities equipped with medical services for those infected.
- In regard to media reports of the deported Nepalese workers, these individuals were in the process of leaving Qatar prior to the Coronavirus containment measures. Their departure is not a result of the public health and welfare programs underway, but rather the result of previous violations of the law. The respective individuals found trafficking in illegal and dangerous goods were repatriated to their country of citizenship, in line with Qatar's legal system. These activities predate the quarantine of the Industrial Area, one of the initial actions taken as part of the national response to COVID-19. Qatar will continue to provide free, world-class healthcare, including check-ups, testing, treatment and medical supplies to all citizen

and residents without discrimination and regardless race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, or residency status.

- In the context of the continuous efforts to mitigate the consequences of the precautionary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Qatar on migrant workers and domestic workers, it has been decided to provide all the necessary facilities for domestic workers to open bank accounts, including exemptions on the minimum amount requirement, and facilitating making bank transfers to their countries and families. This was coupled with a national campaign- including in the press conference of the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management - in different languages to make the workers aware of these services and facilities.

In regards to Reformatory and Penalty Institutions Department, the State of Qatar continues to provide specialized health care services and has provided all the support and follow up to ensure that the virus does not reach these centers. Some of the measures include establishing a field hospital in Um Salal fully equipped with medical services to face any infections that may arise. In the event of an infection, the Ministry of Public Health shall be notified and notification is made in a transparent manner to protect the inmates from contracting the Coronavirus.

In support of the efforts of the government, and in coordination with the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management, non-governmental organizations such as Qatar Charity and Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) have exerted tremendous efforts to provide support to the migrant communities. This includes distribution of 43,000 food baskets, 94,000 hot meals, and 41,000 personal hygiene and sterilization bags (these are the statistics up until the 9<sup>th</sup> April and the efforts continue) , and extending the support for those in need for an additional three months. In addition, QRCS has developed educational videos in four different languages and 1,000 educational publications have been distributed in nine languages. QRCS is testing more than 78,000 individuals across the various QRCS centers, in addition to the presence of 641 medical cadres of QRCS, 105 volunteers working in the field of sterilization, and 15,000 volunteers working in various fields (these are the statistics up until the 9<sup>th</sup> April and the efforts continue).

In addition, Qatar has spared no effort to fulfill its humanitarian role in providing aid and support to different countries around the world. Qatar has provided medical supplies and equipment to China, Italy, the United States, Iran, Palestine, Lebanon and countless others.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to coordinate with all embassies in Qatar to ensure the coordination in the protection of human rights of all residents, including migrant workers. In a recent briefing with a number of United Nations representatives in Qatar and the region, including the International Labor Organization, we referred to the various local and international efforts of the State of Qatar in combating the novel Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic and answered their questions in this regard. The UN representatives praised the efforts of the State of Qatar in combating this pandemic at the national level and for all those who live in Qatar without discrimination by providing free medical examinations and high-quality services. They also commended the international efforts of the State of Qatar by sending medical shipments and aid to different countries, and the support of the evacuation of people stranded in the high-pandemic areas, including United Nations personnel.

As always, we welcome all civil society organizations, trade unions and media outlets to report without restriction. Coordinated by the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management, the State of Qatar has been transparent in providing accurate information about COVID-19 and remains committed to protecting workers and providing equal services to all. During its recent history, Qatar has demonstrated its ability to accelerate reforms in the face of unprecedented change. During the

current global health crisis, our population has responded through a collective effort that cuts across many of the differences that underpin our unique society. While the government remains fully focused on containing and ultimately eradicating the Coronavirus, the aim is that many of the temporary measures introduced today, including several highlighted in this letter, will lead to permanent changes that have a positive effect on the society as a whole.

Yours Sincerely,

Lolwah Rashid Al-Khater

Spokesperson for the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management

Sources:

- Government Communications Office statement on the reopening of Industrial Area with reorganized exit and entry

<https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/2020/05/06/industrial-area/>

-Eighth press conference by the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management:

<https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/briefing-room/eighth-press-conference-by-the-supreme-committee-for-crisis-management/>

-Seventh press conference by the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management:

<https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/briefing-room/seventh-press-conference-by-the-supreme-committee-for-crisis-management/>

Press conference by the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management:

<https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/briefing-room/>

Covid-19 Information available in different languages:

-Ministry of Public Health:

<https://www.moph.gov.qa/english/Pages/covid19videos.aspx>

<https://www.moph.gov.qa/english/Pages/Coronavirus2019.aspx>

-Government Communications Office:

<https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/focus/covid-19/>

<https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/2020/04/16/lte-to-the-new-york-times-by-the-government-communications-office-deputy-director-for-media-affairs/>

-Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a dedicated page for the Asian languages in Qatar:

<https://mofa.gov.qa/en/qatar/covid-19-information>

-Qatar Companies Penalized for not Abiding by Government Measures to Protect Migrant Workers:

<https://news.qna.org.qa/lang/en/w/article/1586810265560197600>

-Ambassador of Nepal:

<https://www.gulf-times.com/story/660421/Citizens-and-expatriates-fighting-a-common-enemy-t>

-Ambassador of India:

<http://www.qatar-tribune.com/Latest-News/ArtMID/423/ArticleID/29161/Qatar-has-taken-decisive-steps-to-address-COVID-19-crisis>

-Ambassador of Bangladesh:

<https://m.gulf-times.com/story/660639>

-Ambassador of Pakistan:

[https://twitter.com/GulfTimes\\_QATAR/status/1250179025475112960?s=09](https://twitter.com/GulfTimes_QATAR/status/1250179025475112960?s=09)

-A dedicated Twitter account in multiple languages to raise awareness across the different segments of the population.

<https://twitter.com/covid19qatar>

