

QATAR AND ITS PROBLEMS AS A FUTURE FIFA WORLD CUP HOST



By:

Miguel Antonio Rodriguez Glaudemans

CRW Researcher & Reporter
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INTRODUCTION :

The FIFA World Cup ("FWC") has proven to be the most popular sports event in the world, even over the former also still very popular Olympic Games. The FWC, just like the Olympic Games, are held every 4 years in a different hosting country. It's popularity of football among the population of this years' hosting country – Brazil – have enabled the Brazilian government to hold the games, despite some local and international controversy. There were local protests and international organizations objections to the way the national budget was being spent, when Brazil still has critical poverty conditions; also there were rumors around poor working conditions for construction workers, involved in the building of infrastructure for the 2014 FWC which were eventually held there. So, when the new hosting countries where voted and announced back in 2010 by FIFA, the news was taken with some surprise by both, the media and the football fans. The hosting countries for the years 2018 and 2022 were (are) Russia and Qatar respectively.

RISING PROBLEMS AROUND QATAR AS A FWC HOST :

Russia had some support in the Europe/Asia regions, and there were no Ukraine events yet to argument strongly against the nomination and its result. The FWC was never held in the chosen countries, but this hardly served as argument. On the Qatar decision however there was more to worry about, such as the weather conditions, for example. FIFA has declared that it had considered this fact, and planned and is still planning to move the event from its traditional period (summer in the north, between June and August) to a more friendly climate (winter in Qatar). In the Qatar-summer it may be unsafe to hold the FWC, due to its drastic high local temperatures (around 50° Celsius or 122° Fahrenheit).

Now, moving the championship to winter brings along some problems, such as having to move other championships, or have them remove around two months of their own tournaments. This may specially a problem in Europe. About 70% of the players which were called to play for their national teams play in Europe, and it may get difficult, even on the legal plane, to have them play normally, unless FIFA comes up with a creative solution, which may be the case. Still moving the event will be different and various countries. But perhaps, as FIFA seems unwilling to change their decision for Qatar right now, besides a legal review of the voting circumstances, as there have also been reports and complaints of alleged corruption to favor Qatar with the FWC. If this is proven, one can only theorize on



what FIFA's decision to make up for the corruption, even so, there might be no change of host for the 2022 FWC.

QATARS POLICIES WHICH MAY AFFECT THE WORLD CUP :

It may seem that for now FIFA has not been much move by a lot of arguments and allegations against the decision of holding the FWC in Qatar in 2022. But there are more very heavy reasons against Qatar, which are the human right issues which occur in the country. As there are many, it may be best to focus ones which may serve its purpose better to pressure both FIFA and the Qatar Government.

LGBT CITIZEN RIGHTS IN QATAR :

First, there is the LGBT (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transsexuals) rights issue of Qatar. Homosexuality is punishable and considered a crime in Qatar. It also is the same way in Russia, although, perhaps not directly as a consequence of religious thought, which may be the case in Qatar. Anyway, there are numerous reports of abuses against LGBT related groups and individuals performed by authorities. Groups and organizations fighting for LGBT rights have stated against the decision of Qatar's (and Russia's 2018) right to host the FWC in 2022. At first, FIFA's chairman Joseph Blatter, in an interview in 2010, laughingly advised the gay community which would attend to the World Cup in 2022 to refrain from having sexual activity during their stay in Qatar, after of which he explained that he expected that there would be no problems for them in Qatar, and that they would be able to attend the matches at the FWC. Pro-LGBT groups asked for Batter's resignation or apology, and he eventually did the last, some days after the occurrence. Also, FIFA has a zero-tolerance policy against discrimination, which still questions its own decision to make Qatar and Russia the hosts for the next FWCs. Some advance on the subject by FIFA was made when in 2013 Blatter created the FIFA's Anti-Discrimination Task Force. The objective of the creation is to make sure FIFA's member countries prioritize its measures against discriminations in football events, and to guarantee fairness and equality among players. It also was made to help national football associations to take measures and to standardize antidiscrimination policies throughout its members around the globe. Even so, LGBT groups demand FIFA change the 2022 FIFA World Cup host for a more civil-rights friendly country, whilst also pressuring FIFA to make a clear statement towards the issue and try and change or guarantee conditions for the FWC of Russia in 2018.



KALAFI THE SPONSORSHIP SYSTEM :

Besides the LGBT issues which the gay community of Qatar suffers, there are more reasons for FIFA to rethink its choice about Qatar; namely, Kalafa. Kalafa is a Sponsor system for foreign labor workers, which is said to resemble a new slavery condition, where an employer (in Qatar, usually a construction company) plays a main role for their employee's civil rights. The workforce of Qatar is counts about 1.2 million foreign workers, which are mostly from India, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Under the Kalafa sponsorship system workers need authorization of their employees to remain working, stay legal and even to leave the country. Companies in Qatar under this system (also referred to as Kafel) also are responsible for their employees legally and economically while they work under a contract with them, and some workers have their passports taken away from them, which is said to be guarantee for the Kafel. This makes it very easy for Companies to blackmail their so-called "temporary workers". Some of them don't get paid in time, having to wait for months for their well-earned paychecks. Others live in very deplorable accommodation in specific worker sites and neighborhoods, where illness is common place and there is lack of basic living conditions, such as warm water, furniture such as beds, and at times scarce electricity. When attempting to leave the country, as authorization from their Kafel is required, they face a whole new set of problems, waiting even for years for their passports to be returned, and with no possibility to make their situation legal again. Some workers from tired of the Kalafa abusive system and become illegals in Qatar, working and earning a living in whatever way they are able to, because Kafel also need to extend specific authorization for the worker to change employers, which does not happen frequently, particularly for construction workers. Overall foreign workforce is very vulnerable, even when they are not affected directly with the aforementioned problems. It does not end there. Atop of all the problems for working migrants in Qatar, there is high death toll among foreign workers. A report of the international law firm DLA Piper analyzing the situation of foreign workers in Qatar uses figures and numbers reported by the government of Qatar itself. According to the report, between 2012 and 2013 about 964 foreign workers have died o in Qatar due to numerous reasons, mostly of "sudden cardiac death", although also from falls, and 28 of them committed suicide. There are lot of very impressive stories of abuse of the employers to their employees, such as deprivation of cooling systems and even refrigerator provision on both worksites and home accommodations. Hygiene is harshly heard of, as they have to share bathrooms with very poor plumbing systems.

Under this system is where the infrastructure of Qatar was and still is being build, among them, infrastructure directly related to the FWC of 2022. The whole situation plays against Qatar's image of ultramodern constructions and buildings. The Kalafa system is tagged as



being one of the fuels of Qatar's growth. Inhuman as the system may be, Qatar continues to receive a lot of foreign workforce, and has promised to FIFA that it would work on improving the situation for its workers, although a profound change of Kalafa is not yet heard of. One proposed change of Kalafa makes it even easier for Companies to hire foreign workforce, and does little to improve workers situation directly, or for local Companies to do something about their situation.

RECENT ABDUCTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS :

The problem of Qatar with its human rights related policies and global image was deepened with the sudden disappearance of two UK human rights activists which were investigating the workforce situation in Qatar. On August 30 (2014) Krishna Upadhyaya, 52, and Ghimire Gundev, 36 reportedly vanished, and were admitted to be detained by the Qatari government on September 7th. They were freed on September 9th. They were permitted to leave Qatar in the next 9 days. The image of Qatar keeps being affected by this sort of occurrence, which seems to be deemed as common by some activists, really affect Qatar's credibility as a FWC host in 2022.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIFA :

As it seems that despite all of what is set out before, FIFA seems to be reluctant to change the 2022 hosts of the FWC. Still FIFA should take action and pressure the government of Qatar on the issues which are mentioned in this article. These should aim at the following:

- Open and improve laws against homosexuality in the country.
- Follow FIFA's set out policies against discrimination and adapt their regulations.
- Improve laws and regulations to improve their human and citizen rights related laws.
- On foreign Workers:
 - Improve their workers situation by regulating companies and activating labor rights.
 - Come up with migration improvements for foreign workers.
 - Warrant the workers their paychecks and fine companies which delay these payments.
 - Better their workers accommodation.
 - Regulate contracts between workers and employers, and stop abusive clauses to be activated in favor of the employers.
 - Oversee recruitment processes of Kafel of foreign workers.



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- Guarantee the payment of overtime to foreign workers.
- Improve health and safety conditions on and offsite for foreign workers.
- Conduct regular inspections on the working sites where construction is done in infrastructure related to the FWC in 2022 and on all construction sites in general.
- Warrant access to justice of foreign workers, even when their status may not be legal at any particular time.

In general, CRW recommends to FIFA to fight for the overall abolition of the Kafala Sponsorship System, which is a detriment to human and citizen rights of the foreign workforce in Qatar.