

## The (not so) beautiful game

*Qatar's blatant disregard for worker wellbeing is a stain on the football world, argues Willy Fautré.*

By Willy Fautré

The Parliament Magazine (1.07.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2RRydm4> - Unable to call home, no ability to challenge employers over unpaid wages, losing access to your passport, living on a subsistence diet of bread and water. This is the reality of daily life for Nepalese workers building the stadiums and infrastructure for the 2022 Qatar World Cup.

Earlier this month, FIFA President Gianni Infantino was re-elected unopposed, saying the organisation had become 'synonymous' with 'equality' and 'human rights'.

Nothing could be further from the truth on the building sites of Doha.

The steady flow of disturbing reports about the reality of worker conditions in Qatar have become a veritable flood over the past six months.

In February this year, Amnesty International published their findings on conditions in migrant labour camps, describing workers as living in 'cramped, dirty and unsafe accommodation', which was also in violation of Qatari domestic law.

This is despite clear assurances from the Qatari authorities back in November 2017 that it would make wide-ranging reforms.

These included pledges to improve worker conditions, guarantee minimum wages and end the practice of preventing labourers from leaving their jobs or the country.

So far the evidence suggests that far from enacting these improvements, Doha has allowed the situation to worsen.

Hans-Christian Gabrielsen, Leader of Norway's Confederation of Trade Unions, summarised the tragic nature of the situation, noting that "If we were to hold a minute of silence for every estimated death of a migrant worker due to constructing the Qatar World Cup, the first 44 matches of the tournament would be played in silence."

Such a situation should see football's governing bodies hang their heads in shame for promoting the game's glamour over the lives and rights of vulnerable workers.

To put the scale of the tragedy into further context, there were zero worker deaths in the building of London's 2012 Olympic Games, 10 in the construction of 2008's Beijing Games, which itself came in for heavy criticism over worker rights, and 21 for Russia's 2018 World Cup.

By contrast, the International Observatory of Human Rights estimates the death toll for the 2022 World Cup could reach a horrifying 4,000 by the time the first ball is kicked

There has been admirable work done to expose the level of Qatar's mistreatment of workers and lack of action of increasingly empty sounding reforms.

However, the lack of outrage over what everyone can see is an appalling human rights situation is shameful.

This alone should have been enough to see the Gulf state stripped of hosting rights, regardless of the well documented allegations of corruption in the bidding process.

Instead we have seen FIFA and its President, Gianni Infantino, trumpet the expansion of the global game to the tiny Gulf state, an unedifying spectacle given what we know about the treatment of workers.

When it comes to speaking out about the lack of compensation the families of Nepalese workers have received from the authorities in Doha, following the death of a relative, FIFA has been damningly silent.

Earlier this month, it was reported that the Nepalese Embassy in Doha was being inundated with requests from workers to be repatriated.

Having been lured by promises of fake visas, freedom to move jobs and decent pay, the grim reality has seen them want to return.

One of the worst aspects of this situation is these workers only understand the reality once they're already trapped in the country.

It seems unlikely at this late stage that Qatar will be stripped of its hosting rights, despite a mountain of compelling evidence suggesting it should be.

However, FIFA and the footballing world still have considerable power to enact change, help end these abusive practices and prevent further tragically unnecessary deaths.

We can only hope that between now and the tournament's inauguration, they will finally step up and do what's right.