

SEARCH/BACK to search results

Bookmark Reprints

This is the property of the Daily Journal Corporation and fully protected by copyright. It is made available only to Daily Journal subscribers for personal or collaborative purposes and may not be distributed, reproduced, modified, stored or transferred without written permission. Please click "Reprint" to order presentation-ready copies to distribute to clients or use in commercial marketing materials or for permission to post on a website.

Wednesday, December 17, 2014

## World Cup, courtesy of modern slavery

**Julie L. Kessler** is an attorney based in Manhattan Beach, is a freelance writer for various publications and is the author of the award-winning book "Fifty-Fifty, The Clarity of Hindsight." You can reach her at [www.JulieLKessler.com](http://www.JulieLKessler.com).



I grew up on a steady diet of "football," and by that I mean soccer. Soccer was part of the family lore and lexicon. But recent events in the soccer world are depressing.

On Dec. 2, 2010, Qatar won the bid to host the 2022 World Cup by the International Federation of Football

Association (FIFA). Winning out over bids from Japan, Korea, Australia and the U.S., Qatar will be the first ever Muslim and Arab country to host this international event.

Qatar won the bid despite that summer temperatures routinely hover at 120 degrees Fahrenheit and sometimes even higher. In a mammoth construction undertaking, the Qataris' bid detailed plans to build nine new football stadiums and remodel three current ones. The Qataris' said they would refrigerate the gargantuan structures with enormous air-conditioning units to maintain a balmy inside temperature of 82.4 degrees. Besides the stadiums, additional construction is to include a state-of-art high speed rail and a metro system to link the various stadiums, the new International Airport in Doha and Lusail City, a coastal development that FIFA officials say complimented the bid.

There was quite a bit of controversy surrounding the Qatari bid's win, including several allegations of bribery - then there were allegations that the investigation into those bribery allegations were tampered with and defective.

Undertaking construction of this magnitude would be a monumental task for any sized country. It is exacerbated for the tiny Gulf state of Qatar. As of 2013, Qatari citizens total just 278,000 people; representing only 13 percent of the total population. The balance of its 1.5 million residents are non-Arab expatriates, comprised mainly of Indians, Nepalese, Filipinos, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans and Pakistanis. While Qatar is the world's richest country per capita, Qataris themselves do not do manual labor. At all. Period.

So what's the richest country in the world to do? Enter the South Asian immigrant labor force.

Here's the problem: These impoverished South Asian workers are lied to by companies who recruit potential employees in these poor nations about nearly everything: about their working conditions - often working 11 hours a day, six days a week in 120 degree heat and living in rodent and bug infested squalor; about their salaries - many are paid \$1 per day after taking onerous loans at home to get to Qatar - and they can't change jobs or leave Qatar since the recruiting companies use the controversial "kafala system" - a form of sponsorship for foreign migrant workers that binds the employee to the host employer, who control employees' passports, identification cards and required exit-visas to depart. If all of that were not bad enough, approximately 1,000 migrant workers have died since Qatar won the FIFA bid.

FIFA has been distancing itself from these facts and has also claimed that deaths occurring on stadium grounds differs from deaths in general construction. That would be laughable were it not so tragic. As if one could or should logically differentiate between a de facto indentured servant's death at a football stadium under construction versus the metro or railway designed and built to serve it.

Amnesty International naturally weighed in and a representative stated that FIFA was "involved" in this debacle "whether it likes it or not."

**JEFF KICHAVEN**  
COMMERCIAL MEDIATION  
888-425-2520 [jk@jeffkichaven.com](mailto:jk@jeffkichaven.com)

Last September, The Guardian revealed a blistering investigative report on the deaths of dozens of Nepali construction workers. Between June 4 and Aug. 8 of 2013, at least 44 men died, half from heart attacks. The report also found that many of the South Asians building the World Cup infrastructure were not even supplied with enough food or water. Seriously? In the richest country on earth? In the name of soccer?

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has estimated that 4,000 more workers could die if the work force grows as expected before the 2022 World Cup.

ITUC has called Qatar a country with only "a facade of government." Nevertheless, ITUC is calling upon Qatar to establish laws guaranteeing living wages and collective bargaining rights for migrant workers and to abolish the kafala system.

Of course FIFA would prefer to ignore this implorable situation, but it absolutely must not.

Following The Guardian's report, Qatar appointed DLA Piper to examine the claims of migrant construction worker abuses. The DLA Piper report found that Qatari construction workers were being subjected to forced labor and serious exploitation and severely criticized the kafala system. Unfortunately, the DLA Piper report did not advise that the Qatari exit-visa system be immediately repealed, but advised it should be slowly phased out. Perhaps most surprisingly, the report did not consider that parts of the kafala system violate international law since it prevents the basic right to leave a country.

Qatar has a history of being an abusive place to work. And not just with regard to the construction industry.

For those of you who follow soccer, you may remember the case of Zahir Belounis, the French soccer player stranded in Qatar without pay for two years following a pay dispute with his former football club. Even after agreeing to withdraw his financial claims, he was still denied an exit-visa under the kafala system. It was not until shortly before ITUC representatives and the global players' union FifPro were scheduled to arrive in Qatar in November of last year that Belounis' exit-visa was granted.

Then there is perhaps the least vocal group of all: the foreign domestic workers in Qatar. These are destitute women, many of whom are from the same South Asian nations as the construction workers. There are over 84,000 female migrant domestic workers in Qatar and many suffer utterly unspeakable conditions, including seven-day work weeks of 100 hours of labor per week, with many banned from ever leaving the homes in which they toil. And many women have reported sustained and severe physical and sexual abuse.

Amnesty International reported that an Indonesian domestic showed researchers deep scars on her chest where her female employer had used a hot iron to brand her. Domestic workers have reported having their hair pulled, their eyes poked, and being kicked down stairs. In one shocking case, a Filipina woman broke both legs and her back while trying to flee an imminent rape by her employer. She didn't make it far; even though she was immobile and severely injured, her employer raped her, *then* decided to call for an ambulance. Despite that six months later the domestic was still wheelchair bound, the prosecution tossed the case out citing lack of evidence.

And just two weeks ago, an American couple from Pasadena was finally granted exit -visas to return to the U.S. following a two-year ordeal, which included several months in a Qatari prison. Matthew Huang, an engineer, originally went to Qatar in 2012 with his wife and three adopted children, to work for a company involved in the infrastructure preparations for the 2022 World Cup.

The labor and structural problems facing Qatar are long standing, deep-rooted and complex. Those difficulties however do not give the Qataris a pass. Neither in football nor in the international community. Winning the bid to host the 2022 World Cup (despite both the win and the bribery investigations into it being mired in controversy), and ultimately hosting this international event is a show case for the Gulf state of Qatar. And not that it needs the revenue, but thousands and thousands of fans the world over will descend on the tiny Gulf state for the World Cup.

Membership in the human race mandates those responsible for building infrastructure and stadiums to house international sporting events, and the domestics who care for locals, be treated like human beings. If we the fans allow the abuses to continue and remain silent, then we too are guilty and part of the problem regardless of our passport's color.

Heinous human rights abuses such as these can never be tolerated. Much less in the name of football. Ever.

**Julie L. Kessler** is an attorney based in Manhattan Beach, is a freelance writer for various publications and is the author of the award-winning book "Fifty-Fifty, The Clarity of Hindsight." You can reach her at [www.JulieL.Kessler.com](http://www.JulieL.Kessler.com).

---

[HOME](#) : [MOBILE SITE](#) : [CLASSIFIEDS](#) : [EXPERTS/SERVICES](#) : [MCLE](#) : [DIRECTORIES](#) : [SEARCH](#) : [PRIVACY](#) : [LOGOUT](#)