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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[02 August 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Modern forms of Slavery in the Middle East

Migrant workers in some Arab Persian Gulf countries are experiencing widespread instances of human rights abuses. Benefiting from labor abuse, modern luxurious high-rises emerge in the employer countries, adding to the tourist attractions and the States' huge income, while the workers have their low wages delayed. A majority of the foreign workers in the region face violations of their right to health, right to freedom of movement, right to peaceful association and assembly and right to a decent standard of living.

For example, in Saudi Arabia migrant workers, who constitute more than half of the workforce, are abused by the Kafala system (sponsorship). The system requires the workers to seek their employer's permission to change their jobs which can easily lead to forced labor. Saudi workers are faced with abuses such as delayed wages, long working hours and illegal passport confiscation.

It is reported that "domestic workers, predominantly women, faced a range of abuses including overwork, forced confinement, non-payment of wages, food deprivation, and psychological, physical, and sexual abuse without the authorities holding their employers to account. Workers who attempted to report employer abuses sometimes faced prosecution based on counterclaims of theft, "black magic," or "sorcery"."¹

In the United Arab Emirates, migrant workers face serious abuse and mistreatment despite the protective provisions of the country's labor law. There are reports of migrant workers complaining widespread labor abuse² including low wages, excessively long working hours, below the standard living conditions, forced labor and in some cases passport codification. The situation of domestic workers is even worst since they are "excluded from regulations that apply to workers in other sectors". There are 300,000 domestic workers in the country and half of them are women.³ UAI denies human rights activists' access to migrant workers⁴.

In Qatar, there are about 2 million migrant workers⁵ suffering from modern forms of slavery. Human Rights groups have raised serious concerns about the situation of the countries' migrant workers especially the "systematic abuses"⁶ of construction workers of Qatar World Cup 2022 Stadium. The workers have been facing serious violations to their rights including, long working hours in hot weather conditions, delayed wages, low standard living conditions in cramped and filthy labour camps⁷, confiscation of passports, forced labor, deprivation of exit permit and being threatened if complain about working conditions. The excess of abuse is to a point that according to the reports more than a thousand⁸ migrant workers have lost their lives in the country.

In Bahrain, almost the same situation applies to the lives of about 10 thousand migrant workers who suffer form, excessively long working hours, delayed and low wages, passport confiscation, physical abuse, forced labor⁹ and unsafe living conditions. The domestic workers, overwhelmingly women, confined in the houses suffer from slavery-like working conditions, experiencing physical abuse and sexual assaults. Bahraini¹⁰ and International NGOs have raised

¹ . <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/saudi-arabia>

² . <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/qatar-migrant-workers/>

³ . <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/united-arab-emirates-law-to-protect-migrant-workers-fails-to-cover-domestics-a6717146.html>

⁴ . <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/united-arab-emirates/report-united-arab-emirates/>

⁵ . <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/mar/31/migrant-workers-suffer-appalling-treatment-in-qatar-world-cup-stadiums-says-amnesty>

⁶ . <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/03/30/football/fifa-world-cup-qatar-migrant-worker-abuse-amnesty-international/>

⁷ . <http://www.seeker.com/how-bad-are-qatars-human-rights-violations-1953131093.html>

⁸ . <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-33019838>

⁹ . <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2016/258720.htm>

¹⁰ . <http://www.migrant-rights.org/category/gulf/bahrain/>

serious concerns about violation of migrant workers' rights in the country ¹¹ and their poor living standards as a consequence of widespread discrimination.

In Kuwait where the same Kafala system governs the situation of migrant workers, there are reports of similar abuse of the exploited people who consist more than 80% of the country's work force¹². Although, there has been attempts to amend labor laws in some of the Arab counties of the region; the workers suffer from the old norm of exploitation in the absence of penalties for abusive employers and other enforcement mechanisms. The country's migrant workers experience human rights violations including passport confiscations, long working hours, delayed wages and physical and sexual abuse.

Being concerned about the rights of the abused migrant workers, the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence calls on the international community and other NGOs concerned with the situation of migrant workers to intervene and urge the States to:

- Ratify the Migrant Workers Convention and ILO conventions and make sure that the national laws are in conformity with international legislation and put an end to the Kafala System.
 - Bring perpetrator employers to Justice and stop the culture of impunity.
 - Safeguard the rights of victims by facilitating their equal access to courts, legal counsels and legal information about their human rights.
 - Put effective measures in place to prevent employers from illegally keeping the employee's passports.
 - Guarantee that the principles of non-discrimination are applied to domestic workers including women.
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¹¹ . <http://www.migrant-rights.org/2015/12/bahrain-migrants-everyday/>

¹² . <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/business/2013/09/kuwait-labor-market-reliance-foreign-workers.html>