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## **No More Coffins: Stop Abuse and Deaths of African Migrant Workers in Saudi Arabia**

The African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa [www.ituc-africa.org](http://www.ituc-africa.org)) is deeply alarmed by the growing labour rights abuses crisis surrounding African migrant workers in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. A recent report has revealed that at least 274 Kenyan workers have died in Saudi Arabia over the past five years, with many more undocumented cases involving Ugandan, Ghanaian, and Nigerian workers facing similar fates. These tragedies, disproportionately affecting African women employed as domestic workers, expose a systemic pattern of exploitation, abuse, and impunity that demands immediate and decisive intervention.

To imagine the large and growing number of deaths of these persons who went to Saudi Arabia to work and earn a decent living, and not as recruited mercenaries serving in some civil conflict. It is beyond comprehension and unacceptable. Africans coming back home in coffins and bereavement to hundreds of families must stop.

### **Disturbing Testimonies and Systematic Human Rights Violations**

The testimonies of returnee workers paint a horrifying picture: unpaid wages, arbitrary detention, forced labour, physical violence, starvation, sexual assault, and psychological abuse. Even more chilling are the cases where our fellow Africans return home in coffins, with autopsy reports revealing clear signs of torture—burns, electric shocks, broken bones—only for their deaths to be falsely classified as ‘natural causes.’

This is not the price African workers should have to pay for seeking better economic opportunities. The commodification of African labour, where politically connected recruitment agencies and labour brokers prioritise profit over human lives, has created a modern-day system of indentured servitude. Many African governments have signed Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements (BLMAs) with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states; however, these agreements have failed to ensure the safety and dignity of their citizens. Instead, they have facilitated the steady export of vulnerable workers into environments rife with abuse, where accountability is almost non-existent.

We are profoundly concerned that abuses, exploitation and deaths of African migrant workers may continue in Saudi Arabia as the kingdom prepares to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup and the implementation of its modernisation plan. These tasks would require a large number of migrant workers to complete them. We are already seeing a rise in the number of BLMAs that Saudi Arabia is signing with African governments. We are concerned that these agreements lack sufficient rights protection mechanisms, do not have adequate monitoring mechanisms, and are heavily influenced by demand-side interests. More African migrant workers need not continue to die.

## **A Call for Urgent Action and Accountability**

ITUC-Africa demands that Saudi Arabia and all GCC states take full responsibility for protecting all migrant workers within their borders, ensuring safe working conditions, fair treatment, and justice for those who have suffered abuse. No more cover-ups. No more impunity. Those responsible for the exploitation and deaths of African workers must be held accountable in Saudi Arabia and anywhere they occur.

Furthermore, African governments must end their complicity in this crisis. Mere statements of concern are insufficient—we call on them to:

- Renegotiate or revoke exploitative labour agreements that fail to protect their citizens.
- Provide awareness, education, and training for potential migrant workers on how to ensure their safety and how to seek help when in difficulty, including life-threatening situations. Toll-free call lines should be made available at the point of departure and in the countries of destination/host countries.
- Implement stricter regulations on recruitment agencies to prevent trafficking and labour exploitation.
- Provide comprehensive legal, consular, industrial relations and diplomatic support for their citizens facing abuse abroad.
- Strengthen trade union partnerships and worker protection mechanisms to monitor, report, and prevent further violations.

ITUC-Africa reaffirms its unwavering commitment to ending the abuse, exploitation, and deaths of African migrant workers. We will mobilise our networks, engage policymakers, and demand accountability from all actors involved in this deadly cycle of exploitation. We are currently engaged in our campaign to encourage Saudi Arabia to implement inclusive, collaborative, and genuine reforms of its labour migration governance, both in law and in practice. We shall not be deterred or rest until we see genuine and sustained respect for black lives in Saudi Arabia. Black lives matter!

Black lives matter. African lives matter. The dignity, safety, and rights of African workers must be protected, regardless of their location in the world.



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