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ITUC-AFRICA WELCOMES THE ERADICATION OF EXIT PERMITS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS IN QATAR

The African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa www.ituc-africa.org) welcomes the recent announcement by the Qatar government to abolish exit permits for migrant workers. We commend the Qatar government for the obvious show of genuine commitment towards meeting her pledge made to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to effectively reform her labour laws so as to bring them in conformity with ILO Conventions and other international statutes. Indeed, since August 2017, Qatar has commenced a holistic review of her Labour Codes to rid them of vestiges that facilitate and promote human and labour rights abuses.

This development is particularly welcome for Africa because many of her labour migrants to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have been subjected to all manner of exploitation, abuse and slave practices on account of the exit permit, which is one of the elements of the kafala sponsorship system for labour recruitment in the GCC states.

We call on other GCC states and Gulf countries, notably Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman to undertake similar reforms to their labour codes with the view to protect and secure the rights of workers, especially migrant workers who constitute the majority of the workforce. In particular, ITUC-Africa is of the view that a genuine labour code review by Saudi Arabia, being the biggest GCC economy, will send a positive and inspirational signal to the other members of the GCC states to also commit to reform like Qatar is doing.

ITUC-Africa also calls on African governments, especially those that have signed Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements (BLMAs) with GCC states to see and use this exit permit abolition by Qatar as an inspiration to renegotiate BLMAs that have Kafala system provisions and to replace them with better human and labour rights protection clauses.

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