

World Cup: Qatar defends human rights record

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News

The deputy Prime Minister of Qatar has admitted to MEPs that his country “can still do more” on meeting international standards on labour rights.

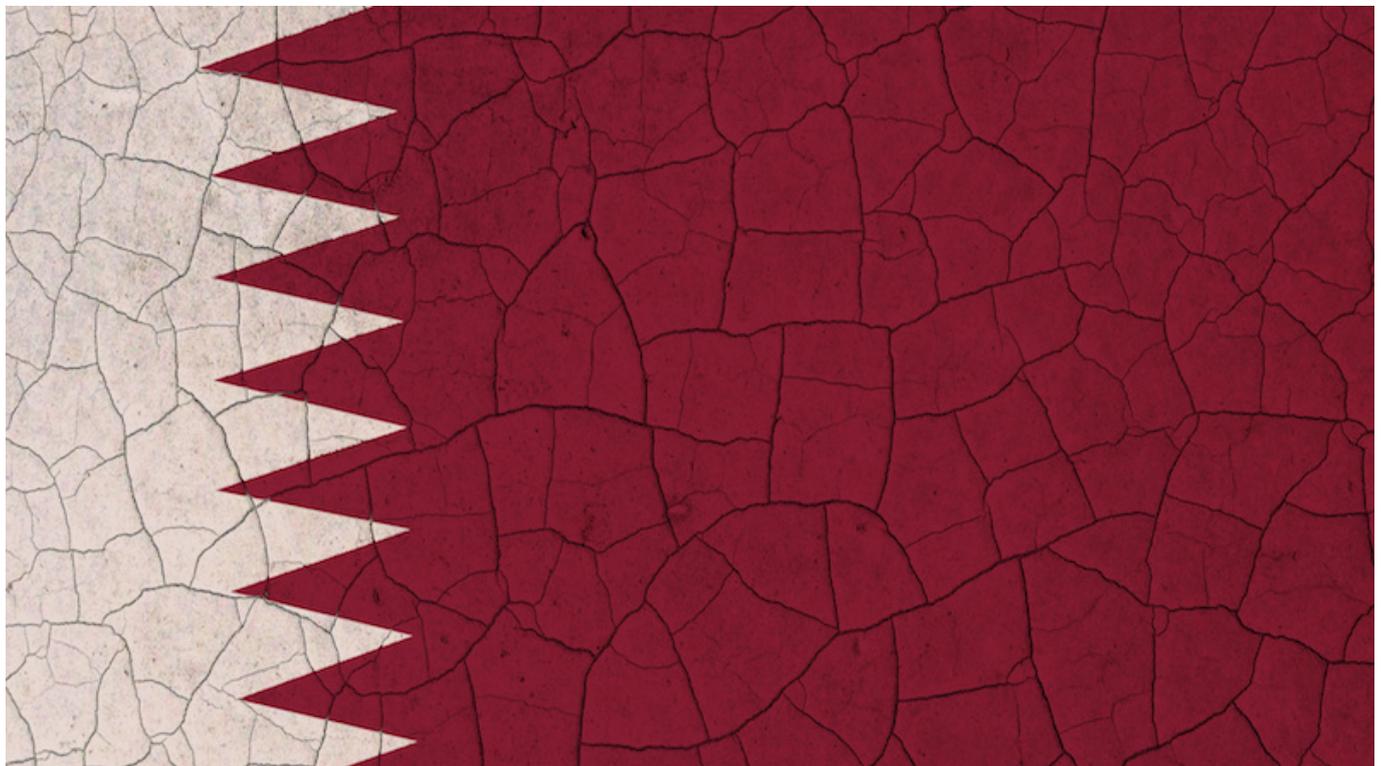


Photo credit: Press Association

The minister was responding to criticism by some deputies that while it will spend an estimated \$200bn on major infrastructure projects ahead of the 2022 World Cup, it appears that the wellbeing of the workers building these facilities has often been overlooked.

The supreme committee organising the event has recorded 10 deaths since October 2015.

The number of workers at World Cup stadiums is expected to rise from 12,000 to 36,000 this year and the issue was raised at a meeting of the foreign affairs committee on Thursday.

At the meeting, Qatar's deputy Prime Minister and minister of foreign affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said the country had made a lot of progress on the issue of labour rights in recent years.

"We have had European parliamentary delegations visit the country and MEPs have seen this progress for themselves."

However, he added, "Even so, we are ready to accept criticism of this and try to deal with it positively. We welcome any criticism. This actually compares with certain other countries.

"One thing we will not accept is any slackening in the number of inspections or regarding safety on building sites at these venues. Indeed, the number of inspections and number of inspectors have been doubled. We take conditions for workers very seriously and will not tolerate a single death."

Other MEPs also questioned the minister on the country's record regarding respect of religious minorities.

He said he rejected allegations of any such restrictions, saying, "People in Qatar are free to practice their religion."

He also updated the committee on the still ongoing Gulf crisis, saying he was still hopeful of a peaceful resolution.

Last June, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain along with Egypt announced an embargo on Qatar, setting off the Gulf crisis. So far, Kuwait's mediation efforts have not yielded any results with the blockading nations, who say they will not change tack unless Qatar agrees to a list of 13 demands.

The demands include cutting ties with Iran and shutting down the Al Jazeera media network.

On this, he told the meeting, "There is a stalemate present but we are engaged in very positive dialogue and I am hopeful of a resolution."

His appearance at the committee is timely as it came in the week the European Commission announced it is investigating the EU's biggest sea-borne gas supplier Qatar Petroleum over potentially restrictive 20-year supply agreements inhibiting development of a single gas market.

Qatar is the world's biggest LNG producer and its geographical location between Europe and Asia also allows it to swing supply to the most lucrative market, which causes periodic supply shortages particularly in northwest Europe.

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter for the Parliament Magazine

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Categories

[International Relations](#) [2]



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