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Mr. Patrice Motsepe
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Dear President, Dr. Motsepe,

RE: A Call for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Respect (African) Migrant Workers' Human and Labour Rights

On behalf of the African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa: <https://www.ituc-africa.org/>) with its 18 million registered members in 52 African countries, I write to you with profound concern regarding Saudi Arabia's egregious abuse and undermining of migrant workers' rights, which we feared will worsen with its planned bid to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup. While the bid, led by the Saudi Arabian Football Federation, has garnered significant support, we must address the Kingdom's alarming track record on human and labour rights, especially concerning African migrant workers.

Mr. President, as you might be aware, Saudi Arabia has long faced criticism for its treatment of migrant workers, who endure severe exploitation and abuse. Reports indicate instances of forced labour, passport confiscation, excessively long working hours without rest, physical and verbal abuse, and restrictions on freedom of movement and communication. Such practices violate international labour standards, including the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour, which Saudi Arabia ratified in 1978. The Global Slavery Index 2023 by Walk Free highlights Saudi Arabia's high prevalence of modern slavery in the Arab States region, driven by economic practices and systemic discrimination that perpetuate forced labour conditions.

Saudi Arabia still practices the Kafala System. The kafala system, a sponsorship-based employment framework in Saudi Arabia, binds migrant workers to their employers, granting the latter extensive control over workers' legal status and employment conditions. This system has facilitated numerous abuses, including severe restrictions on workers' freedom of movement, ability to change jobs, passport confiscation, denial of wages, and threats of deportation, effectively trapping workers in exploitative situations. Despite recent reforms, the kafala system continues to expose workers to forced labour and severe human rights violations. It is a widely held view that the Kafala system in place in Saudi Arabia encourages, perpetrates and sustains modern slavery practices.

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, migrant workers, especially Africans, are given the most crude and brutal human treatment. Exposure of African migrant workers to all manner of discrimination, hate, extremist and racist treatment by their Saudi Arabian employers seems normal. Women workers endure the worst of the treatments, including sexual, verbal and

physical harassment and violence. African migrant workers in Saudi Arabia face regular threats to stay silent and not demand their rights. To do otherwise, these affected workers face dire consequences of further maltreatment. An African migrant worker who refused forced silence on account of wage delay, denial and theft suffered a brutal and fatal end as she was set ablaze to serve as a deterrent to others.

Mr. President, these allegations are neither light nor fabricated. Of course, the world knows that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has equally meted out conscienceless attacks on its citizens (the case of Jamal Khashoggi and the public flogging of women demanding the right to drive). Besides, ITUC-Africa has conducted extensive research and evidence-gathering on the working and living conditions of Migrant workers in Saudi Arabia. To stress the dire human and labour rights situation of African migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, we are sharing six testimonies from different African migrant workers for your appreciation. There are several more.

Worker Y - Ethiopian Worker: "I arrived in Saudi Arabia expecting to work as a domestic helper. My employer confiscated my passport immediately upon arrival. From day one, my employer subjected me to work from early morning until late at night with no breaks. The house was large, and I had to clean all day without rest. My wages were withheld for the first six months by my employer, and my attempts to leave the house were serially met with threats of violent attacks and deportation. My employer constantly reminded me that I was in their country and had no rights."

Worker T - Kenyan Worker: "I was promised a well-paying job but ended up working 18-hour days as a cleaner. My employer locked me in the house whenever they left, ensuring I couldn't escape. I was verbally abused and physically assaulted when I asked for my wages. My living quarters were a small, windowless room in the basement. I couldn't contact my family or seek help as my employer confiscated my phone and forbade me from using the internet or making calls."

Worker C - Tanzanian Worker – "I was hired as a cook but ended up working as a general labourer. My employer locked me in the house and made me work long hours without pay. My employer beat me when I asked for my wages and denied me medical treatment for injuries sustained in the cause of my work and from physical abuses I suffered at the hands of my employers. I had to clean, cook and do manual labour, often with little to no sleep. The physical and mental abuse was overwhelming".

Worker R - Somali Worker – "I went to Saudi Arabia to work as a cleaner but was treated like a prisoner. My employer kept my passport, made me work without rest and threatened me constantly. I was not allowed to leave the house or speak to anyone outside. The isolation was devastating, and I had no access to my family or friends. The constant fear and abuse took a severe toll on my mental health".

Worker Z - Nigerian Worker – "I was promised a job as a driver but ended up working as a labourer in terrible conditions. My employer confiscated my passport and threatened to harm me if I didn't comply. I worked long hours without proper food or rest. The work was physically demanding, and I could not escape or seek help. The fear of retaliation kept me silent and compliant".

Mr President, because of this dire human rights situation, we call on your esteemed football governing body, a member of the global football governing body, FIFA, to compel it to respect its commitment to human rights as enshrined in its statutes and reinforced through the FIFA Human Rights Policy, which emphasises protecting human rights in all operations. We are quoting Principle D as a critical principle for the bidding processes.

d) Commitment to Human Rights and Sustainable Event Management: FIFA is fully committed to conducting its activities in connection with the bidding for and hosting of the final competitions of the FIFA World Cup 2030 and the FIFA World Cup 2034 in accordance with sustainable event management standards and practices (in line with ISO 20121), safeguarding principles for the protection of children and adults at risk, and respecting internationally recognised human rights in accordance with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Hosting the World Cup in a country with a record of significant human rights violations, such as those experienced by migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, would contravene these principles and tarnish the reputation of the beautiful game.

Thus, as FIFA prepares to vote on 11 December 2024 to ratify Saudi Arabia as the host of the 2034 FIFA World Cup, ITUC-Africa urges CAF to compel FIFA to take a firm stance on human and labour rights issues. FIFA must ensure that the rights and dignity of all workers, particularly African migrant workers, are respected and protected. The upcoming World Cup presents an opportunity for CAF to ensure that FIFA leverages its influence to promote significant and lasting reforms in Saudi Arabia.

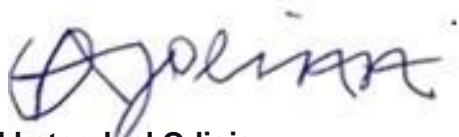
Mr. President, to ameliorate the poor human and workers' rights track record, ITUC-Africa recommends the following:

1. **Comprehensive Labour Reforms:** CAF and FIFA should demand that Saudi Arabia implements comprehensive, inclusive and collaborative labour reforms, including the abolition of the kafala system, to protect migrant workers' rights.
2. **Enforcement of Labour Laws:** CAF and FIFA should ensure that Saudi Arabia enforces its labour laws and provides adequate protections for all workers, including fair wages, reasonable working hours, and safe working conditions.
3. **Independent Monitoring:** FIFA should require the establishing an independent monitoring body to oversee the treatment of workers involved in World Cup preparations and operations and ensure compliance with international labour standards.
4. **Worker Representation:** CAF and FIFA should advocate for establishing mechanisms that allow workers to freely associate and bargain collectively to improve their working conditions. Saudi Arabia must guarantee migrant workers' rights to freedom of movement, communication, and association. It must also include the immediate cessation of passport confiscation and restrictions on workers' ability to seek help and report abuses.
5. **Human Rights Commitments:** FIFA should make Saudi Arabia's commitment to human rights a central criterion for its bid, requiring concrete actions and timelines for improving the rights and conditions of migrant workers.
6. **Accountability and Transparency:** FIFA should require Saudi Arabia to provide regular reports on the progress of labour reforms and the treatment of workers, ensuring transparency and accountability in addressing human rights concerns.

In conclusion, the privilege of hosting the 2034 FIFA World Cup carries the responsibility of upholding and protecting human rights. CAF must ensure that FIFA's decision must reflect its unwavering commitment to human rights and fair treatment for all. By holding Saudi Arabia accountable for its human and labour rights practices, FIFA can ensure that the beautiful game remains a beacon of fair play, respect, and dignity for all.

We urge you to consider these issues seriously and act to protect the integrity of the World Cup and the beautiful game itself. We shall continue to champion this cause until we see genuine reform in law and practice driven by inclusive and collaborative processes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Akhator Joel Odigie', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Akhator Joel Odigie
ITUC-Africa General Secretary