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**UN Human Rights Council  
Twenty-seventh session: 8-26 September 2014**

**Item 6:  
Consideration of UPR reports**

**QATAR**

Mr. President,

Amnesty International is concerned that foreign migrant workers continue to be exploited and abused by their employers in Qatar. Domestic workers have no legal protection of their labour rights and are barred from lodging complaints against their employers, despite being forced to work excessive hours with no days off. Amnesty International's research reveals that the sponsorship system creates an excessively unequal power relationship between employers and workers, which can amount to forced labour.

We welcome Qatar's acceptance of recommendations to reform both the labour law<sup>1</sup> and the sponsorship law,<sup>2</sup> and in particular, urge the government to unambiguously abolish the exit permit requirement, which is a violation of the right to freedom of movement by migrant workers.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. President,

Although positive steps have been taken to combat discrimination against women and prevent human trafficking, we are concerned that women in Qatar still face barriers in exercising their human rights in law, policy and practice. There is no law criminalizing domestic violence and the government has yet to acknowledge the problem of violence

<sup>1</sup> A/HRC/27/15, recommendations 124.59-124.62 (Denmark, Belgium, Italy, Norway)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, recommendations 124.78-124.81 (Spain, Uruguay, Belgium, UK)

<sup>3</sup> Article 13 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country".

against domestic workers in the home of their employer, to the extent that women who report sexual abuse to the authorities risk being charged with 'illicit relations' rather than offered protection.

We welcome Qatar's acceptance of recommendations to criminalize violence against women and to enable domestic workers to file complaints of violence and abuse without fear of reprisals.<sup>4</sup> We are disappointed, however, that recommendations to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and to lift reservations to the Convention were rejected.<sup>5</sup>

Freedom of expression remains strictly controlled in Qatar and individuals face lengthy prison sentences solely for peacefully exercising this right. Amnesty International regrets Qatar's rejection of a recommendation to release all prisoners of conscience, including the poet Mohammed al-Ajami,<sup>6</sup> who is currently serving a 15-year prison sentence for writing and reciting a poem considered critical of the ruling family. Amnesty International urges the immediate and unconditional release of Mohammad al-Ajami.

Finally, Amnesty International is dismayed that only this week the government has enacted a cybercrimes law which contain provisions that risk further restricting freedom of expression in Qatar. It should be amended.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, paragraphs 124.42 (Czech Republic), 124.43 (Belgium), 124.80 (Belgium)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, paragraphs 124.17 (Ghana), 124.26 (Portugal), 124.37 (France), 124.38 (Mexico)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, para. 125.7 (United States of America).