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## Human Rights Concerns in Qatar

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### SUMMARY

- Curtailment of freedom of expression increased in the run-up to FIFA World Cup 2022.
- Women and LGBTI people continue to face discrimination in law and practice.
- The death penalty remains retained in law.
- Despite government reforms, migrant workers continue to face labour abuses and struggle to change jobs freely<sup>1</sup>.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UK GOVERNMENT

Amnesty International is calling on the UK government to address human rights concerns in Qatar, by pressing the Qatari Authorities to:

- Quash the sentences and grant the immediate release of Abdullah Ibhais, and brothers Hazza and Rashed bin Ali Abu Shurayda al-Marri.
- Tackle discrimination against women through investigation and accountability mechanisms.
- Repeal appalling anti-LGBT laws, ensuring in the meantime that all LGBT people residents or visitors have their rights fully protected, both now and after the World Cup.

### FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Authorities continued to curtail freedom of expression using abusive laws to stifle critical voices.

For example, in the case of **Abdullah Ibhais**, the former communications director for Qatar's 2022 World Cup organizers. Abdullah is a Jordanian national who is serving a three-year prison sentence following an unfair trial in Qatar, that was based on his so-called confession which he claims was obtained coercively. On 15 December 2021, the Court of Appeal upheld his conviction on charges including misuse of public funds and reduced his prison sentence from five to three years. He is now appealing his case before the Court of Cassation and throughout this year, **Amnesty International has continued to call on the Qatari authorities to quash Abdullah Ibhais' sentence and grant his immediate release.**

On 10 May 2022, the Criminal Court of First Instance in Doha, issued its verdict against four members of the Al Murra tribe, following a trial marred by a number of due process violations. The court handed lawyers and brothers **Hazza** and **Rashed bin Ali Abu Shurayda al-Marri** life sentences and sentenced to two other men to life and 15-years in prison in their absence – all on charges relating to the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

The charges included:

- contesting and refusing laws and decisions ratified by the Emir

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, read our briefing covering the ongoing violations of workers' rights in Qatar: [Amnesty International UK - Qatar Migrant Workers' Rights Briefing 2022 | Amnesty International UK](#)

- resorting to threats and social media to urge the Emir to carry out work within his legal specialty
- undertaking actions which would compromise the independence of the state
- convening and organizing a public meeting without authorization
- violating societal values and principles online and using social media.

These charges relate to speeches and poetry they made or published online that were critical of a recently adopted electoral law that is discriminatory to members of al-Marri tribe, by excluding thousands of them from voting or running in the election. **Hazza** and **Rashed bin Ali Abu Shurayda al-Marri** were calling for equal rights to political participation.

[Amnesty International is calling for the convictions and sentences against the four men to be dropped; to immediately release Hazza bin Ali Abu Shurayda al-Marri and Rashed bin Ali Abu Shurayda al-Marri, and pending their release, to ensure they have regular access to their family, their lawyers and any medical attention they may require.](#)

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Women continue to face discrimination in law and practice. Under the guardianship system, women remain tied to their male guardian, usually their father, brother, grandfather or uncle, or for married women, to their husband. Women continue to need their guardian's permission for key life decisions to marry, study abroad on government scholarships, work in many government jobs, travel abroad until certain ages, and receive some forms of reproductive healthcare.

Family laws continue to discriminate against women by making it difficult for them to divorce. Divorced women remain unable to act as their children's guardian.

In March 2021, the government disputed the findings of a Human Rights Watch report on discrimination against women in Qatar and pledged to investigate and prosecute anyone who had breached the law. By the end of the year, no such investigations had taken place.

## LGBTI RIGHTS

"Sodomy" or same-sex sexual conduct between men remains an offence under the Penal Code, punishable by up to seven years' imprisonment. Article 296 states that "leading, instigating or seducing a male in any way to commit sodomy or dissipation" and "inducing or seducing a male or a female in any way to commit illegal or immoral actions" is a crime.

At the start of 2021, Mashrou' Leila, a Lebanese rock band whose lead singer is openly gay, cancelled its planned appearance at Northwestern University's Doha campus for "safety concerns" after an anti-gay online backlash. The suppression of **Peter Tatchell's** LGBT protest in October 2022 served as a reminder of this 'repressive climate' around freedom of expression in the country, including for those supporting the rights of LGBT people.

[Amnesty International continues to call on the Qatari authorities to repeal the country's appalling anti-LGBT laws, and in the meantime, ensure that all LGBT people - residents or visitors - have their rights fully protected, both now and after the World Cup.](#)

*"It's an outrage that consensual same-sex acts in Qatar are illegal and can lead to a jail sentence. With only weeks until kick-off, it looks as if the Qatari authorities will miss the immediate opportunity to make abolition of laws and regulations discriminating against people on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identities and expressions a key part of their World Cup legacy."*

Sacha Deshmukh, CEO Amnesty International UK