



# Qatar praised for reforms in labour laws in the region

'New rules implemented to abolish kafala (sponsorship) system, exit visa being waived'

By Mudassir Raja

**A**n enlightening presentation on the topic of 'Labour Reforms in Qatar: Achievements and Next Steps' was recently organised to talk about the extraordinary steps taken by the country for the welfare of the workers.

Swiss Business Council Qatar in collaboration with the business councils of Spain, Portugal, Netherlands, and Philippines organised the presentation at St. Regis Hotel.

The main speakers on the occasion were Mohammed Hassan al-Obaidly, Assistant Undersecretary for Labour Affairs in the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour & Social Affairs, and Houtan Homayounpour, Head of Project Office for the State of Qatar, International Labour Organisation (ILO) Doha.

The presentation was attended by the ambassadors from Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Netherlands and Philippines, representatives of the said business councils, and members of different expatriate communities in large numbers.

In his welcome speech Dr F Samadian, President of Swiss Business Council, said: "On behalf of the participating business councils, I welcome the ambassadors, the speakers, and the audience. I am personally very proud to be in a country which has the largest ILO office in the region. The topic will be covered by the head of the ILO project office in Doha. The achievements in this regard will be shared by the assistant undersecretary for labour."

A documentary was also run during the presentation about the history, mandate and works of ILO.

Speaking on the occasion, Hassan al-Obaidly thanked the business councils for organising the event on the topic of labour reforms in the state of Qatar. "I will speak about the reforms that emanate from the 2030 National Vision of State of Qatar." He also spoke about the first and the second strategies about labour and recruitment of the skilled workers for the forthcoming period and also to create working environment that can encourage investment and the right of self-employment.

Al-Obaidly said: "We have recently implemented new rules just to abolish kafala system. We



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have started giving freedom to the workers to move and the exit visa is being waived so the workers can leave the country for holidays.

"We have been working with our partner - ILO - to make the procedures easier for the workers to move from one employer to another and to change their employment. We have also introduced laws that ensure that the employers pay the workers through bank accounts. The companies that do not abide by this rule are punished with fines. We are working with ILO to improve our wage protection system."

The ministry official further said: "We have another rule regarding having a workers dispute settlement committee that has to decide a case within three weeks. Among other steps, Qatar has recently set up visa centers in



**DRIVEN:** Houtan Homayounpour, Head of Project Office for Qatar, International Labour Organisation (ILO) Doha, speaking at the event.

different countries. The centres are to facilitate the signing of contracts and carrying out medical checkups of the potential workers. The centres can also have biometric registration of the workers. The partners in the visa centres are the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Health of Qatar. The centres have recently been opened in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka."

He said: "There is another law for establishment of a workers' fund. We have formed a governing body for the fund and it is headed by HE the Minister of Administration Affairs, Labour and Social Affairs. The body has already held different meetings with various partners in

Qatar. The aim of the fund is to pay the worker when their employing company goes bankrupt. The fund will later sue the company afterwards. Further, we have also set up a committee to combat human trafficking. We have also promulgated another law for domestic workers which organises working hours, weekends, annual leave and end of service gratuity."

Speaking on the occasion, Houtan Homayounpour appreciated the steps being taken by Qatar for the workers.

He highlighted the steps towards abolition of kafala system, having minimum wage law, occupational safety and health of workers.

He said that Qatar is first country in the region to introduce these laws.



**AUDIENCE:** Guests and officials seen during the 'Labour Reforms in Qatar: Achievements and Next Steps' event.

Photos by Nassar TK