

# HRW Calls on Qatari Gov't to Step Up Labor Reforms

DOHA (Press TV) – **Human Rights Watch (HRW)** has urged the Qatari government to intensify efforts to better conditions for migrant workers in the Persian Gulf Arab state.

“I think it is right the reforms aren’t going far enough and they are not going fast enough. There is no timetable for reform,” Nicholas McGeehan, the HRW’s Qatar researcher, said at a press conference in the Qatari capital, Doha, on Thursday.

He called on Qatari officials to take “stronger action” to improve the working conditions of workers in the country, criticizing those who say no to labor reforms.

“We need to see much stronger action on those and that’s what’s not being addressed, so that’s really where

our main concerns lie,” he said, adding, “There are two camps [within the government] and unfortunately the naysayers are winning the battle at this stage.”

He further called on Qatari officials to accelerate the process of implementing a wage protection system “very soon.”

“There is clearly a depth of opposition to reform that is holding back the process” of labor reforms in the Arab country, he added.

He said the Qatari government is “responsible” for and should revise labor problems, including the “kafala” sponsorship system in the country.

In May 2014, the Qatari monarchy said it would change the sponsorship

system, which allows Qatari employers to stop their foreign workers from leaving the country or changing jobs, with a new system based on employment contracts.

According to the new law, the exit permit required for migrant workers to leave Qatar will be replaced by a system under which permission is given automatically after a three-day grace period.

Foreign workers could also change their jobs when their contracts terminate, without requiring a certificate to show their previous employer has no objection.

Based on the new law, employers who confiscate the passports of their workers would face tougher penalties.

“We intend to effect meaningful and lasting change for the benefit of all those who live and work in Qatar,” the Labor Ministry said in November 2014.

The treatment of migrant workers in Qatar has sparked international criticism in the wake of reports of deaths at construction sites.

The International Trade Union Confederation stated in June last year that up to 4,000 migrant workers could die in construction site accidents by 2022, when the 2022 FIFA World Cup kicks off.

Human rights groups and FIFPro, the global union representing footballers, have called on Doha to abolish the kafala system, which has been compared to modern-day slavery.

## Oil...

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projections for August 2014 which had foreseen the situation.”

Zangeneh, however, said political factors also played a role. “There is no doubt that political factors have had an effect to sustain the situation; but at what percent, one cannot say for sure,” he added.

The minister said while the United States had seized on the oil price decline to pressure Russia over Ukraine, Iran was less of a target.

“However, we think America and its allies had the intention to deal a blow to Iran,” he added.

Zangeneh further played down divisions among OPEC members, which came to light after they failed to agree on a production cut in the face of sagging prices.

He said those members which cite their fear of shale oil to push for lower prices should be given the benefit of the doubt.

“It is not acceptable to wrong a certain minister who says shale oil would leave the market and the market stabilize under low crude prices. It’s not acceptable to accuse him and raise a hue and cry; rather, we have to wait and see.”

Zangeneh was apparently alluding to Saudi Arabia, which is opposing any production cut.

The minister said despite all the differences, it is more advisable to remain in OPEC.

“I strongly believe that remaining in OPEC is absolutely to our benefit since it is much more convenient to speak from the stand of an organization which produces 30 million barrels of oil per day.”

Zangeneh further said higher oil prices have three advantages for the world: “Firstly, the production of expensive oil becomes economically viable; secondly, they (higher prices) make renewable energy viable and thirdly, they reduce and optimize consumption.”

## Europeans...

(Continued From Page One)

A group of former U.S. officials, including former top diplomatic and military representatives to NATO, recommended recently that the U.S. provide Ukraine with defensive lethal weapons, such as anti-tank missiles.

### U.S. Still Combative

The United States and Europe must stand together over Ukraine as it battles for survival in the face of escalating Russian military involvement, Vice President Joe Biden said during a visit to Brussels on Friday.

“We, the U.S. and Europe as a whole, have to stand with Ukraine at this moment,” he said, amid reports of transatlantic divisions over whether to send weapons to support the Western-backed Kiev government.

“Russia cannot be allowed to redraw the map of Europe.”

Biden also criticized Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was to meet the leaders of France and Germany in Moscow later Friday, of riding roughshod over peace efforts.

“Ukraine is fighting for their very survival right now,” Biden told reporters alongside EU president Donald Tusk.

“Russia continues to escalate the conflict by sending mercenaries and tanks and, as we euphemistically say in the United states, little green men, without patches, very sophisticated special operations soldiers.

“President Putin continues to call for new peace plans as his troops roll through the Ukrainian countryside, and he absolutely ignores every agreement his country has signed in the past.”

Tusk -- the former Polish premier who has spoken out strongly in the past against Russia’s alleged support for pro-Kremlin separatist forces in Ukraine -- said the West must keep up pressure on Russia.

EU officials said Thursday that the bloc will blacklist more Russian individuals over Ukraine, but divisions within the 28-nation bloc, particularly with the new Greek government, have prevented further broad economic sanctions.

“The European Union and the United States need to continue standing shoulder to shoulder, coordinate our efforts and uphold the pressure on Russia for as long as necessary,” said Tusk.

In an apparent warning to German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande as they visit Moscow, Tusk warned against any deal with Moscow that would break up Ukraine.

“We cannot compromise on Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity,” he added.

## Iraqi Army Kills 70 ISIL Terrorists in Baiji Operation



*Iraqi army forces in Baiji*

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – **volunteer forces, have reportedly** Iraqi army soldiers, backed by **launched a major operation against**

**ISIL terrorists in the strategic northern city of Baiji, killing tens of terrorists.**

According to Iraqi officials, army forces managed to liberate a number of villages near Baiji in Salahuddin Province. About 40 improvised explosive devices planted by the terrorists were dismantled during the military operation.

Iraqi armed forces also killed some 70 ISIL Takfiris during their anti-terror offensive, according to the governor of Salahuddin.

Iraq’s army troops have been conducting operations in Baiji, which hosts the country’s biggest oil refinery, since last year.

Baiji is located on a main road to the ISIL-held city of Mosul in Iraq’s north.

Baghdad has so far managed to make numerous gains in the fight against the ISIL terrorists, pledging to continue the battle against the extremist group.

ISIL started its campaign of terror in Iraq in early June 2014. The heavily-armed terrorists took control of Mosul before sweeping through parts of the country’s Sunni Arab heartland.

They have been carrying out horrific acts of violence, including public decapitations, against Iraqi communities such as Shias, Sunnis, Kurds, and Christians.

## Security Forces Kill 25 Suspected Terrorists in Pakistan



*Pro-Taliban militants in Pakistan*

ISLAMABAD (AFP) – **Pakistani security forces have killed at least 25 suspected Taliban terrorists and destroyed seven of their hideouts in the northwest of the country near the Afghan border.**

The operations were carried out in the Sanzila area of South Waziristan and Khyber’s Tirah Valley on Wednesday, an Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) statement said.

Pakistan has intensified its anti-terror campaign following a December 16, 2014, attack on an army-run school in the city of Peshawar, which claimed the lives of about 150 people.

The militant group, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was carried out in retaliation for an ongoing Pakistani military offensive against the militants in the country’s tribal belt.

Following the deadly attack in Peshawar, Pakistan lifted the moratorium on the death penalty in place for about six years. Pakistan is due to execute around 500 militants in the coming weeks. The country has already hanged about 20 militants.

The militant groups in Pakistan have carried out numerous attacks against Pakistani security forces and civilians.

Many Pakistanis have lost their lives in bombings and other militant attacks in the country since 2001, when the Pakistani government entered an alliance with the US in its so-called war on terror.

## Jordan Releases Ex-Mentor of Senior al-Qaeda Member

AMMAN (Press TV) – **Jordan has released a senior al-Qaeda member from jail without providing any reasons, security sources say.**

Issam Barqawi, also known as Mohammed al-Maqdisi, was released on Thursday upon a decision by the head of the state security court.

According to the security sources, the court official ruled against a decision by the state prosecutor to put Barqawi on trial and ordered “his immediate release.”

Barqawi was arrested in October for “using the Internet to propagate the ideas of the terrorist group Al-Nusra Front.”

The decision to free Barqawi, who was once a mentor of slain

al-Qaeda leader in Iraq Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, comes only a day after Amman executed two Iraqi al-Qaeda-linked militants in response to the burning death of a Jordanian pilot by the ISIL terrorists.

On Tuesday, the ISIL released a video online showing the Takfiri terrorists set alight Jordanian pilot Moaz al-Kassasbeh, who had been taken hostage in December 2014. The video showed Kassasbeh dressed in an orange jumpsuit and getting surrounded by flames of fire inside a cage.

The pilot had been captured by the ISIL in December last year, when his plane went down in northern Syria during a mission against the terrorist group.

## Lebanon Thwarts Terrorists’ Plot to Create Security Belt

BEIRUT (FNA) – **The Lebanese intelligence officials have foiled a plot by the militants, operating in Syria, to create a passage to West Bekaa, the South and the North to establish their planned emirate on Lebanese territories, a local daily wrote on Friday.**

The As-Safir wrote that the Lebanese relevant authorities intercepted terrorists’ conversations and seized documents from extremist groups that revealed a plot to open the passage to the West Bekaa area through the Majdal Anjar Valley and to the South so that they could reach areas where Palestinian camps are located.

The plot included the establishment of a route to the Northern area of Qalamoun.

“This security belt” would have led to a scenario similar to the cross-border raid in the Northeastern town of Arsal and a previously thwarted plot to have an emirate in the North, a security official told the daily.