



ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان
Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights

Report submitted to Universal Periodic Review Mechanism on State of Qatar Review

Submitted to: High Commissioner for Human Rights Council to complete requirements of report submitted by State of Qatar to Universal Periodic Review Mechanism.

Submitted by: Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights (holding special consultative status with UN Economic and Social Council)

Deadline: April 2024

Executive Summary:

Maat for Peace, Development, and Human Rights presents this report to the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism to assess the progress made by State of Qatar in implementing recommendations provided during the review of its human rights record in May 2019. The purpose is also to monitor State's adherence to its commitments made during the 3rd periodic review in the field of human rights. Maat deeply regrets that the State of Qatar disregarded over 34 percent of the total recommendations received during the third periodic review.

Out of the 270 recommendations received, the State of Qatar fully or partially accepted only 178, while 92 recommendations were merely noted. This limited cooperation with the universal periodic review mechanism, indifference to the recommendations of other States' parties, and the lack of a clear willingness to learn from the experiences of other countries demonstrates a concerning attitude toward improving human rights.

The human rights situation in Qatar reveals that although the Qatari government accepted approximately 66 percent of the total recommendations from the last review, it has failed to implement most of them due to a lack of necessary political will. Over the years, Qatar has struggled to address challenges in human rights, including violations related to the suppression of human rights defenders and journalists, restrictions on freedom of opinion, expression, movement, peaceful assembly, association formation, political participation, and discrimination against women and religious minorities.

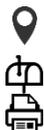
In light of these circumstances, Maat examines the significant human rights developments and events that have occurred in Qatar since the last review. The focus is on the key issues that raise particular concerns for the Association.

First: Scope of International Obligations and Cooperation with International Mechanisms:

During the third periodic review cycle, the State of Qatar received numerous recommendations urging it to expand the scope of its international obligations concerning human rights. However, Qatar has not become a party to several international human rights conventions, instruments, and covenants. These include the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and the Second



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Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which seeks to abolish the death penalty. Qatar has also not ratified the First Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, International Labor Organization Convention No. 189 concerning domestic workers, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Despite recommendations from Maat in this regard, Qatar has not withdrawn its reservations and declarations to the ICCPR and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Regarding cooperation with international human rights mechanisms, although Qatar has issued a standing invitation to special procedures mandate holders, it has postponed visits of several special rapporteurs during the reporting period. This includes the visit of the Working Group on Business and Human Rights, which was scheduled for the first quarter of 2022, the visit of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, scheduled for September 2022, and the visit of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, scheduled for the first half of 2023.

Recommendations:

- Ratify international instruments, treaties, and protocols relevant to the promotion and implementation of human rights that Qatar is not yet a party to.
- Remove all reservations to ratified treaties and ensure the primacy of international human rights standards in case of any conflict with national legislation.
- Consider harmonizing national legislation to fully align with international human rights conventions.
- Accept visit requests submitted by special rapporteurs and facilitate their visits to the country at the earliest opportunity.

Second: Restrictions Imposed on Freedom of Expression, Including on the Internet:

During the previous review session, the State of Qatar received numerous recommendations calling for an improvement in the climate for freedom of opinion and expression. The recommendations urged Qatar to address cases of threats and violence against activists, journalists, human rights defenders, and Internet bloggers. They also emphasized the need to reform the legislative framework that restricts the peaceful expression of opinions and creates an environment that fosters freedom of expression. However, Maat has observed that the Qatari government has only taken limited measures to implement these recommendations. Since the last review, the Qatari government has continued to impose unjustified restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression, both in law and in practice.

Maat's findings reveal that Qatari authorities still enforce repressive laws that curtail freedom of expression, posing significant obstacles to activists, journalists, and human rights defenders who seek to exercise their right to freedom of expression. In the years following the fourth periodic review, the authorities have persistently targeted, arrested, and prosecuted activists, human rights defenders,



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journalists, and bloggers who criticize the government or ruling family or advocate for sensitive and controversial issues such as migrant rights, labor rights, and political reforms. These actions are supported by a range of repressive laws that limit freedom of expression, including the Qatari Penal Code No. 11 of 2004 (amended by No. 2 of 2020). Article 134 of this law stipulates a prison sentence of up to five years for anyone who criticizes the Emir or his deputy.¹ The Press and Publications Law of 1997, Article 46, criminalizes criticism of the Emir, punishable by up to six months' imprisonment. Furthermore, Article 47 of the same law prohibits journalists from publishing material that authorities consider harmful to the state's supreme interests, offends public morals, or disrupts economic conditions in the country. Additionally, the Anti-Cybercrime Law No. 14 of 2014 criminalizes the publication of content on the Internet that authorities deem as violating social principles or values or constituting insults or defamation of others, with a penalty of up to three years.²

To illustrate the aforementioned points, on July 21, 2022, Qatari authorities arrested three online activists, namely Citizen (A.B.H), Citizen (S.B.K), and Citizen (A.S.), who had demanded the lifting of an arbitrary travel ban imposed on them. These activists were associated with the "National Campaign for Those Banned from Traveling," which was established on July 12, 2022, and aimed to advocate for the cancellation of travel bans imposed on numerous citizens who had been arbitrarily banned from traveling for extended periods. During their detention, these activists experienced human rights violations. Credible local sources confirmed that the State Security Service placed them in solitary confinement cells throughout their detention, denied them contact with their families or lawyers, isolated them Incommunicado, and increased security measures around them.³

On August 8, 2021, Qatari authorities arrested seven human rights defenders who expressed their opposition to the laws governing the Shura Council elections held in October 2021. They were charged with using social media to spread false news, as stated in a tweet by the Ministry of Interior: "The competent authorities in the Ministry of the Interior referred (7) people to the Public Prosecution after they used social media to spread incorrect news and incite racial and tribal strife. After examining the content published in their accounts and its connection to the accusation (protesting against the laws), they were charged. They have been referred to the Public Prosecution to proceed accordingly." In April 2021, the Qatari authorities also convicted activist (A.A.), the former communications director of the Qatari Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy organizing the 2022 World Cup, and sentenced him to 5 years in prison. The conviction was based on confessions obtained from him under duress and threats, without allowing him to seek legal assistance. He had criticized the Qatari authorities' handling of the migrant workers' strike in Qatar that took place in August 2019 on social media.⁴

Recommendations:

¹ Qatari Legal Portal, Law No. (11) of 2004 promulgating the Penal Code, link: <https://bit.ly/45ULf6A>

² Qatar Legal Portal, Law No. (14) of 2014 issuing the Anti-Cybercrime Law, link: <https://bit.ly/3SqPGmw>

³ Amidst Crises: The Situation of Human Rights in the Arab Region during 2022, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights, March 26, 2023, link: <https://tinyt.io/AEnI>

⁴ Press release issued by Ministry of Interior - Qatar, Twitter, August 8, 2021, link: <https://twtr.in/3Yxv>



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- Consider amending legislation that criminalizes the expression of opinions and adopt laws on freedom of media and press that align with international standards.
- Cease the harassment and intimidation of activists, journalists, bloggers, and human rights defenders who exercise their right to freedom of expression.

Third: Restrictions on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association:

During the third review cycle, the State of Qatar received several recommendations urging the abolition of restrictions on freedom of assembly and association. However, the rights to peaceful assembly and association continue to be severely limited in both law and practice in Qatar. Maat's findings indicate that Qatari authorities have persistently arrested and prosecuted peaceful protesters and demonstrators. This is supported by a number of repressive laws that curtail individuals' right to engage in peaceful protests, including Law No. (18) Of 2004 concerning public meetings and marches. Article 15 of this law criminalizes unauthorized peaceful public gatherings, carrying a maximum prison sentence of three years.⁵

To illustrate the above, on May 10, 2022, the Criminal Court of First Instance in Qatar sentenced two activist brothers, Hazza and Rashed bin Ali Abu Shurayda al-Marri, who are both lawyers, to life imprisonment for their involvement in organizing public protests against discriminatory laws enacted by the Emir of Qatar in relation to the Shura Council elections. The charges against them included organizing public meetings without a license, challenging the Emir's ratified laws, making threats against the Emir on social media, undermining state stability, and violating social values and principles through the internet. Since their arrest on August 10 and 11, 2021, the two brothers have endured serious human rights violations, including being held in solitary confinement from the time of their arrest until the end of March 2022. During this period, they were subjected to interrogation by State Security Prosecution without their lawyers present with them, and their trial was held behind closed doors. They were prevented from communicating with the family, in violation of their right to a fair trial.

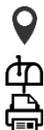
In addition, since the last review cycle, the Qatari authorities have persistently imposed unwarranted restrictions on the right to form and join associations. These restrictions are based on a series of stringent laws that hinder the establishment, registration, and operation of civil society organizations and associations. Notably, Law No. 12 of 2014 prohibits non-citizens in Qatar from establishing and forming associations and civil society organizations. Furthermore, all civil society organizations are required to register with the government, and the formation of an association necessitates prior permission from the Ministry of Administrative Development and Labor. This law grants the Qatari government broad discretionary power to refuse registration and dissolve civil society organizations and associations engaged in activities perceived as political or religious, or those deemed detrimental to national security or public order in Qatar.

Recommendations:

⁵ Law No. (18) of 2004 regarding public meetings and marches, link: <https://tinyt.io/AEnw>



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- Take steps to align local legislation pertaining to peaceful assembly with international standards, particularly by decriminalizing unauthorized public meetings.
- Consider revising Law No. 12 of 2014 to eliminate unwarranted restrictions on the establishment, registration, and operation of civil society organizations and associations.

Fourth: Restrictions Imposed on Political Participation:

During the previous review session, the State of Qatar received numerous recommendations urging the enhancement of citizens' right to political participation. However, Maat observed that the Qatari government did not take the necessary measures to implement these recommendations and continued to deprive a wide spectrum of its citizens of the right to political participation. To illustrate this, the Qatari authorities deprived a broad range of citizens in Qatar, including members of the Al Murra tribe, of the right to run and vote in the first parliamentary elections held in October 2021. This was based on discriminatory laws that limited the right to run and vote to a select group of citizens in Qatar, particularly Law No. 6 of 2021, which introduced the Shura Council election system. This law classified citizens in Qatar as "real" citizens, who obtained their citizenship before 1930, and "naturalized" citizens, who became citizens after 1930. Under this law, only "real" citizens have the right to run and vote in the Shura Council elections.⁶

Recommendations:

- Repeal all laws that discriminate between citizens in Qatar regarding candidacy and voting in parliamentary elections.
- Work towards enhancing the political participation rights of all citizens in Qatar.

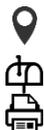
Fifth: Restrictions on Religious Freedom and Discrimination against Minorities:

In previous review cycles, the State of Qatar received several recommendations calling for the promotion of religious freedoms, the eradication of all forms of discrimination against individuals belonging to religious minority communities, and the enhancement of their integration into society. However, Maat observed that the Qatari authorities have not taken the necessary measures to implement these recommendations. Consequently, individuals belonging to religious minority communities in Qatar, such as Christians, Baha'is, Hindus, and Buddhists, continue to face various forms of violence including oppression, persecution, discrimination, and violations of basic human rights persist, impeding the integration of marginalized communities into Qatari society. These communities face various challenges, including religious cleansing policies, physical attacks, mental abuse, forced expulsion and deportation, employment discrimination, denial of residence permit renewals, and exclusion from leadership positions in universities, ministries, and sensitive national security roles.

⁶ 2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Qatar, US Department of State, link: <https://tiny.io/AEzU>



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Furthermore, restrictions are placed on religious expression, the construction of places of worship, and the display of religious symbols. Reliable statistics reveal over 100 systematic attacks and assaults on places of worship, cemeteries, and Christian buildings in Qatar in 2021. Additionally, between September 2021 and October 2022, at least two expatriate Christians were forced to leave Qatar under allegations of religious proselytization.⁷

Recommendations:

- Consider amending or repealing discriminatory legislation and laws targeting religious minority groups.
- Work towards ending policies of expulsion, forced deportation, and religious cleansing against individuals belonging to religious minority communities, particularly Baha'is and Christians.
- Take measures to halt systematic attacks and assaults on places of worship and cemeteries belonging to religious minorities.

Sixth: Discrimination against Women:

During the previous review, the Qatari government received several recommendations urging action to address the discrimination faced by women in both law and practice. However, Maat's findings indicate that women in Qatar continue to experience unfair discrimination in both realms. Specifically, Qatari women encounter obstacles when attempting to transmit their nationality to their children and foreign husbands, as the Qatari nationality law does not permit a Qatari woman married to a non-Qatari man to confer her nationality on her children and spouse, unlike Qatari men married to foreign women. Moreover, the Personal Status Law in Qatar fails to grant women equal rights to men in marriage and divorce. Additionally, Qatari legislation lacks laws criminalizing domestic and gender-based violence against women, as such violence is not classified as a separate crime in the Qatari Penal Code. Furthermore, unmarried women under the age of 25 require their guardian's permission to travel outside the country.

Furthermore, the participation of Qatari women in decision-making positions remains disproportionately low. Among the 19 ministers in the Qatari Council of Ministers, for instance, only three are women, and there are currently no women appointed to the Qatari Shura Council, with only two seats available through appointment based on an Emiri decision.

Recommendations:

- Reform discriminatory laws, particularly the Nationality Law, to enable Qatari women to confer their nationality on their children and foreign husbands on an equal basis with men.
- Encourage the State of Qatar to enact legislation to combat violence against women and criminalize domestic violence.

⁷ In the Spotlight: Minority Rights in Qatar, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights, May 8, 2023, link: <https://tinyl.io/AEzz>



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