

24 September 2013

ITF lobbies for ICAO action on Qatar/UAE rights abuses

The ITF (International Transport Workers' Federation) will push ICAO (the International Civil Aviation Organization) in Canada today for action on flagrant abuses of aviation workers' labour rights by airlines based in Qatar and the UAE.

The ITF will be at ICAO's 38th General Assembly, taking place in Montreal from 24 September - 4 October, where it is proposing that ICAO and the ILO (International Labour Organization) must work together to address the problem. The ITF is already campaigning along with the ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation) for abuses to be remedied.

The ITF states that Emirates, Qatar Airways and Etihad Airways are among the fastest growing airlines in the world. They employ more than 70,000 pilots, cabin crew and ground staff between them. More than 90 percent of their employees are non-UAE/Qatari nationals – all of whom have to rely on obtaining temporary work visas under a sponsorship programme. Although these foreign workers are vital to the success of the airlines, they do not enjoy the basic labour rights (including freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining) which apply in their home countries and in virtually all the nations whose airlines compete with Emirates, Etihad and Qatar Airways.

According to the ITF the case of Qatar Airways is the worst. For example, a standard hiring contract for thousands of the airline's female workers reads: *You are required to obtain prior permission from the company, in case you wish to change your marital status and get married. And: The employee shall notify the employer in case of pregnancy from the date of her knowledge of its occurrence. The employer shall have the right to terminate the contract of employment*

from the date of notification of the pregnancy. Failure of employee to notify the employer or the concealment of the occurrence shall be considered a breach of contract.

ITF president Paddy Crumlin commented: “Earlier this year the ITF and ITUC spearheaded the successful resistance to Qatar’s bid to have ICAO moved to Doha*. The same democratic deficit that torpedoed that ridiculous bid is still in place in these airlines. At the time Qatar Airways’ CEO even went on record as saying: ‘If you did not have unions you wouldn’t have this jobless problem in the Western world’. The fact is that these companies are making a fortune from the efforts of hardworking staff who, undefended, can be discharged and deported on a whim.”

ITUC general secretary Sharan Burrow added: “Nations and companies cannot continue to turn a blind eye to abuses of workers in Qatar. International pressure is growing, from the ILO to the UN Special rapporteur on migrant rights the spotlight is on companies in Qatar to take responsibility for workers’ rights and follow global rules.”

This proposal is one of seven working papers the ITF will present during the ICAO assembly. Among the other papers to be presented are the need for the removal of national obstacles to the collection of safety-related information by airline staff; air pollution at airports; and cabin air quality and its impact on cabin crew.

*see www.itfglobal.org/press-area/index.cfm/pressdetail/8890

ENDS