

H.E. Ms. Sheikha Alya Ahmed Saif Al-Thani  
Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations in New York

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Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations in Geneva

29th September, 2021

Your Excellencies,

### **Questions from Human Rights Council Elections Pledging Event 2021**

On 8<sup>th</sup> September 2021, Amnesty International and the International Service for Human Rights held an online pledging event for candidate States to the Human Rights Council for the membership term 2022-2024.

This year's event had over 200 online attendees and an overwhelming number of questions posed to candidates, providing an opportunity for candidates to present their visions for membership and to engage with a range of stakeholders on their human rights commitments and pledges.

We thank you for your participation in the event. With the goal of furthering dialogue, as well as improving adherence to Council membership standards and accountability, as articulated in UN General Assembly resolution 60/251, please find below the questions addressed specifically to Qatar as well as questions for all candidate States.

The questions, as well as your responses, will be shared on ISHR's website. We request that you please send your responses to Maithili Pai at [m.pai@ishr.ch](mailto:m.pai@ishr.ch) by 8th October 2021.

### **Questions addressed specifically to Qatar**

1. *Migrant Rights*: Will Qatar abolish absconding charges, which harks back to the days of slavery, and are used to intimidate and harass migrant workers?
2. *Migrant Rights*: Will Qatar ensure due judicial process for all migrants who are detained without a fair trial and ensure migrant workers have access to free or affordable legal counsel?
3. *Gulf Center for Human Rights*: How will Qatar respect the rights of citizens to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly?

4. *DAWN MENA*: On January 21, 2021, the Qatari government amended its penal code to include the possibility of a five-year prison sentence for spreading rumors or “false news” with ill intent. How does the Qatari government intend to enforce this law without violating fundamental human rights such as the freedom of expression? What safeguards is the Qatari government taking to ensure that this amendment does not lead to human rights violations?
5. *MENA Rights Group*: Does Qatar plan on abolishing article 8 of the Law on Combatting Terrorism and Article 7 of the State Security Service Law, as recommended by the Working Group on Arbitrary following their 2019 country visit?
6. *MENA Rights Group*: In May of 2020, and for the first time in 20 years, Qatar executed a man convicted of murder. As a member of the Council, will Qatar abolish or instate a moratorium on the use of the death penalty?
7. *MENA Rights Group*: As a member of the Human Rights Council, will Qatar accept all individual treaty-based complaint mechanisms?
8. *MENA Rights Group*: Does Qatar plan on ratifying the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the optional protocols to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment & the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and article 32 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance?
9. *CIVICUS*: What steps are you taking to strengthen the protection of activists who defend the rights of migrant workers nationally and internationally?
10. *Diane Alai - Bahai*: How do you plan to ensure that the freedom of religion of the Baha'is is respected? They are blacklisted, expelled, cannot obtain security clearance & even Qataris are tried on false charges because of their religious beliefs.
11. *Bani Dugal, Baha'i International Community's Principal Representative to the UN*: Ambassador Al Thani, thank you for your personal commitment to promoting human rights -- however my question is about the pattern of blacklisting and deporting of religious minorities from Qatar, in particular members of the Baha'i Faith who are known to be upstanding individuals with no negative record of any kind. Now two individuals have been accused of baseless charges -- one of them is a Qatari citizen and previously head of the Chamber of Commerce and highly regarded in Qatari society -- the only reason for his and other Baha'is being treated as such is their religion
12. *Genoveva Sotirova (Twitter user)*: What actions will your State take to keep women safe from domestic violence and ensure access to education, healthcare and information about In-vitro fertilisation procedures?

### **Questions posed to all candidate States:**

1. *Outright International*: The Human Rights Council continues to be a vital resource for LGBTI communities to bring visibility to the human rights violations they face based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics. However, questions related to LGBTI persons are also unfortunately highly politicized at the Council. How would the candidates present today ensure that

politics does not get in the way of promoting and protecting the human rights of LGBTI persons?

2. *CIVICUS*: What are the steps you will take to ensure full NGO participation in the Council, its mechanisms and resolutions, and to engage with national and international civil society as a Council member?

3. *Human Rights Watch*: NGOs have been banned from UN headquarters since March 2020. Although UN employees, diplomats & media representatives (resident correspondents) can now enter UN headquarters (with restrictions), NGOs remain under a total ban. What will you do to ensure COVID-19 isn't used as a convenient excuse for those who are not fans of civil society to bar NGOs from UN headquarters? Will you support allowing accredited NGO representatives to participate in UN headquarters activities in line with all UN guidelines and restrictions like other UN stakeholders?

4. *Child Rights Connect*: What are your plans to mainstream and advance child rights at the Human Rights Council?

5. *Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations*: How do candidate states intend to promote the protection of human rights defenders, at the national level and within the Council?

6. *Permanent Mission of the Principality of Liechtenstein to the United Nations*: Ensuring accountability for human rights violations should be a priority for all States, especially Human Rights Council members. The support of the ACT Code of Conduct is an important factor for Liechtenstein's support of a candidature, in addition to its human rights record, pledges and commitments. To what extent are you prioritising strengthening accountability and supporting the ACT Code of Conduct?

7. *Eric Richardson*: I would like to ask all the candidates their position on participation of civil society in the meetings and informal negotiations of the Council. During COVID-19, civil society's participation has been severely restricted, more so than at any other time in the Council's history. Links for informal negotiations which take place online are not publicly posted, NGOs are not permitted to enter the plenary room unless they are giving a speech, and during the recent Special Session on Afghanistan, there were time periods where no civil society was present due to the webcast shutting down and the ban on civil society's attendance in person. If elected, would you reverse these trends and maximize the opportunities for civil society to participate in all meetings of the Human Rights Council?

8. *Genoveva Sotirova (Twitter user)*: What are your plans in order to improve access to healthcare to low-income individuals?

9. *Genoveva Sotirova (Twitter user)*: What is your plan to promote the right of access to education of Muslim and Roma women refugees?

### **Questions posed and answered during the event:**

1. *Migrant Rights*: Will Qatar recognise and act against human trafficking for forced labour, and ensure prosecution of those who abet the crime, and not prosecute victims of trafficking?

2. *DAWN MENA*: What tangible steps are Qatari authorities taking to remove prohibitive restrictions towards recognizing and strengthening women's rights? For example, how is the Qatari government addressing impediments to women exercising their autonomy and enjoying their right to health, such as requiring the permission of a male guardian or a marriage certificate before providing

health care to adult women? And steps to end discriminatory provisions in personal family laws that deprive Qatari women of equal rights in divorce, child custody, and inheritance?

3. *MENA Rights Group*: In its visit to Qatar in 2019, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention urged Qatar to amend all laws that restrict the ability of CSOs to carry out their advocacy functions & monitoring of prisons. How does Qatar plan on removing such restrictions on the establishment & operations of CSOs?

We look forward to hearing from you.



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