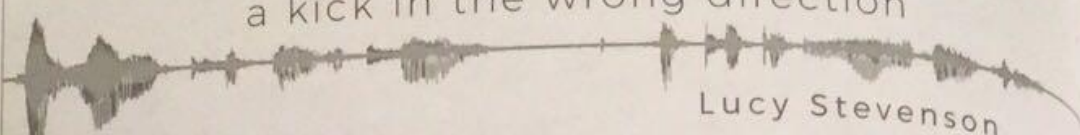


THE **WORLD CUP** IN **QATAR:** a kick in the wrong direction



Lucy Stevenson

On December 2, 2010, Qatar was announced as the winner of the 2022 World Cup host bid. Over four and a half years later, the world's response hasn't changed; North America and Europe are still frustrated and confused, the Middle East is still ecstatic with anticipation, and the International Football Confederation, FIFA, is still adamantly determined to see it through. Despite the heated opposition Qatar has faced, including accusations of modern-day slavery, logistical evidence against the scorching summer climate, and allegations of corruption in Qatar's campaign and bid, FIFA has publicly announced that there will not be a re-vote for the host of the 2022 World Cup (Borden). Convincing FIFA officials to change the outcome of the vote now appears to be a lost cause, but that does not make the standing vote justifiable or right. It is blatantly obvious that FIFA has made a mistake, and it is now up to individual soccer fans to either support the 2022 World Cup or take a stand against it.

Because hosting the World Cup in the Middle East is a first, Qatar is determined to see that it is made a big deal. Unlike most host nations, who settle for the construction of a new stadium or simply an expansion of public facilities, Qatar is setting a new precedence by building an entire city in preparation for their role as host of the big game. According to CNN, this new city, known as Lusail, is set to be completed in 2019 and will cost an estimated \$45 billion (Griggs). But as construction progresses without hesitation, there are many voices speaking out against it. According to Brandon Griggs, the majority of the estimated 20,000 construction workers building Lusail are migrant workers from India and Nepal (Cable News Network). Even more disconcerting, an article published in *Sports Illustrated* stated that "an independent study by a multinational law firm cited 430 Nepalese and 567 Indian worker deaths in Qatar" over the last two years as a result of horrifying working conditions (Wahl). An article published by *The Guardian* claimed that the rate of migrant worker deaths in the summer of 2013 was as high as one fatality per day. The article states that

investigations have also exposed that workers have had their passports confiscated and their salaries denied for months on end to eliminate any possibility of leaving (Pattison). Being held against their will and forced to work in such awful conditions makes it certain that these individuals are not just migrant workers—they are modern-day slaves.

These slaves are literally doing the heavy lifting to make this World Cup happen, and their suffering is absolutely sickening. *The Guardian* has also stated that World Cup infrastructure projects were specifically said to have been worked on using forced labor (Pattison). As one migrant worker, Ram Kumar Mahara, told *The Guardian*, “We were working on an empty stomach for 24 hours; 12 hours’ work and then no food all night.... When I complained, my manager assaulted me, kicked me out of the labour camp I lived in, and refused to pay me anything” (Pattison). Human rights activists are outraged at the thought of allowing these slaves to build the very stadium the games will be played in.

Some advocates, however, believe that allowing Qatar to host is exactly what the country needs to stimulate change in Qatari labor laws. Justin D. Martin, for example, firmly believes that the media attention Qatar will receive in hosting the World Cup will raise public awareness and place pressure on the Qatari government to not only make changes to their labor laws, but also to enforce them (*New Republic*). To some extent, this belief has already manifested itself in the fact that Qatari labor law underwent some reform in May of 2014 in response to criticism. However, Amnesty International has stated that “while some of the measures announced [in May] are positive and if implemented would improve conditions for workers, they do *not* go nearly far enough” (Bollier, emphasis added). According to a more recent article, published six months later, the organization warned that Qatar’s promised changes were “woefully inadequate” (Gibson, “Qatar Accused of Dragging”). Realistically, the Middle East’s revolution of human rights is much more of a stretch than many want to believe. In the meantime, as stated by the International Trade Union Confederation, “up to 4,000 workers could die before a ball is kicked at the 2022 World Cup” (International Trade Union Confederation). To support Qatar’s hosting of the World Cup *and* take an ethical stand for human rights is impossible.

The safety of these workers is not the only concern, however; concerns have also been raised by health officials about the safety of athletes playing in Qatar's scorching desert heat. This has caused FIFA to reconsider the feasibility of holding the Qatar World Cup in the summer. In the 2014 World Cup held in Brazil, games were stopped when temperatures peaked above 86 degrees Fahrenheit. Compared to Qatar's summer climate, however, Brazil's high eighties seem like nothing. As stated by Samuel Chi, summer temperatures in Qatar are commonly known to reach up to 120 degrees Fahrenheit (*The Diplomat*). Originally, Qatar promised to have the latest in air-cooling technology to keep fans and players safe and comfortable. But according to an article in *Business Insider*, "the promised cooling technology ... 'hasn't yet come into existence' ..." ("Qatar is Quietly Breaking"). According to another article, published in *The Independent*, medics have directly stated that allowing the Cup to take place in such heat is too great a risk. Forget the issue of comfort—it is simply too dangerous. Obviously, holding the World Cup games in the summer heat is not a viable option.

This has left FIFA to turn to other alternatives, and fans may be watching the World Cup in the winter months instead. But this solution isn't that simple. In another article by Tony Manfred, moving the World Cup to the winter months to accommodate the difficult climate will have adverse effects in other aspects. One option FIFA has considered is moving the Cup to January and February, which would certainly solve the heat issue but would also create a direct conflict between the World Cup and the Winter Olympic Games. Two of the largest world sporting events would be occurring at exactly the same time, and the media is anything but thrilled. According to Manfred's article, NBC laid \$7.75 billion down to claim coverage rights on the Olympic Games between 2022 and 2032, and Fox spent \$425 million on the World Cup. To have both occurring at the same time would divide viewers and hurt ratings on both sides (Manfred, "FIFA Might Move"). And on top of hurting news companies, the splitting of viewers would also result in less fan support for the athletes who have worked their entire lives to compete in such renowned sporting events.

From an American perspective, moving the World Cup to the winter will have adverse effects on ESPN and the NFL as well. Manfred points out that ESPN made record-breaking revenue in covering the

2014 World Cup in Brazil this past year in light of the fact that there was not another world event competing for viewers' attention. But holding the World Cup in the winter puts it in conflict with the NFL playoffs and the Super Bowl, and even if it was held in November and December, the Cup's publicity would go head to head with the regular NFL season. "Fox will have to compete with the NFL for interest and viewers," Manfred writes. "And to make things even more complicated, it will have to compete with itself for interest and airtime since it also owns NFL broadcasting rights" ("FIFA Might Move"). Even in America, where soccer is less prevalent, moving the World Cup will have a negative impact.

The consequences of allowing Qatar to slide through the cracks could create a snowball effect of corruption in international soccer.

The greatest argument against Qatar's right to host in 2022 is regarding the allegations of bribery made against the former president of the Asian Football Confederation, Qatar's Mohamed Bin Hammam. According to an article published in the *Sunday Times*, Bin Hammam was accused of bribing Caribbean soccer officials with envelopes stuffed with \$40,000. As stated by the anonymous author, "The payments were made...[in] May [of 2012], while Bin Hammam was standing for the FIFA presidency against Sepp Blatter" (*Sunday Times*). After examinations by both outside investigators and FIFA's ethics committee, substantial evidence was found to justify his suspension. In October of 2012, before he could publicly be banned from international soccer for life, Bin Hammam resigned from all soccer positions, leaving his opponent Sepp Blatter to win the election without competition (*Sunday Times*). In response, thousands of people are questioning whether Qatar really won the bid fair and square. In more cases than not, this article being no exception, most individuals are finding themselves rather doubtful of the ethics behind Qatar's victory.

Qatari bid organizers claimed that Bin Hammam's unethical actions had nothing to do with Qatar's win for the 2022 host bid. According to an article by Owen Gibson, Bin Hammam was not on the Qatari bid team and therefore had no influence over Qatar's win ("Qatar Hits Back"). However, an article in the *Sunday Times* has stated

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that “although Bin Hammam was not officially part of the bid team, its chairman has described him as the bid’s ‘*biggest asset*’” (*Sunday Times*). Whether he was involved directly or indirectly, it is obvious that Bin Hammam had plenty of weight to pull Qatar into favorable standings.

After months of controversy, a recent article published in the United Kingdom’s *The Telegraph* announced that FIFA confirmed that Qatar *did* in actuality manipulate the vote by using bribery. FIFA’s report acknowledged multiple instances of unethical strategies used by Qatar, including bribing the African Football Confederation with 1.8 million dollars in return for exclusive marketing rights, making suspicious payments to Argentina and Brazil days before the ballots were cast, and having a “significant lack of transparency” in Qatar’s relationship with two consultants whose “questionable conduct...could constitute chargeable offences” (Rumsby). The report also addressed and condemned the actions of Bin Hammam in his bribing of Caribbean soccer official Reynold Temarii of the Oceania Football Confederation, who was suspended for accepting Qatar’s bribes. According to FIFA’s report, Temarii’s suspension eliminated a vote in favor of Qatar’s biggest rivals. “It is evident that Mr. Bin Hammam supported Qatar’s bid” the report stated, “and that his actions with respect to Mr. Temarii influenced the voting process by eliminating votes for Australia (a direct Qatar 2022 competitor) and England” (Rumsby). Qatar’s discrepancy has now been admitted, proven, and confirmed, and yet FIFA will not back down.

Despite all of the facts pointing against Qatar’s ethics regarding their win of the bid, FIFA has stated that “there was not enough evidence to strip the Gulf state of the event” (Rumsby). FIFA has confirmed that these incidents took place—has proven that Qatar is guilty of these unethical offenses—and yet they are comfortable with applying the excuse of justification. Two wrongs do not make a right, and claiming that Qatar’s unethical actions weren’t weighted to sway the vote *enough* to change the outcome does not make its actions acceptable. If we act as if nothing happened and support Qatar in the 2022 World Cup, what other scandals will be faced in the future? The consequences of allowing Qatar to slide through the cracks could create a snowball effect of corruption in international soccer.

FIFA has chosen to make justifications. They have chosen to let it go. But that does not mean that the 2022 World Cup in Qatar deserves our support. If the lack of human rights, the brutal heat, and the scheduling conflicts weren't enough to illustrate the lack of Qatar's qualification, its lack of honesty does. It is not right to shred an entire schedule of professional athletics to accommodate a country who doesn't deserve the opportunity. It is bad enough for migrant workers to die in the name of soccer, but for them to lose their lives in the name of a country whose intentions are unjust and scandalous is an outrage. Given the circumstances, hosting the World Cup in Qatar is more than just a kick in the wrong direction—it's a kick in the teeth.

If FIFA won't take a stand for what is ethically right, the United States must. This is why I urge American soccer players and fans to join in a boycott against the Qatar World Cup. It is obvious that this soccer tournament has become far more than just another competition. It is now a matter of corrupted leaders, unethical standards, and abused human rights. Real victory is now more than scoring a winning goal—it is taking a stand for progress. And that progress is a victory that, around the world, we should all be cheering for.

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