

Dear Signatories,

We are writing to update you on the status of our efforts over the last year to secure fair labor conditions for the workers who will be constructing the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi as well as other cultural organizations on Saadiyat Island.

From the beginning, we have requested that more open access be granted to those interested in observing conditions on the Saadiyat Island construction sites as well as worker accommodations servicing that site, in order to continue to assess the situation in a free and unobstructed manner. This monitoring would also be a way for organizations such as Human Rights Watch to continue the research they began in their first report "Island of Happiness" (May 2009).

<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2009/05/18/island-happiness-0>

This minimal level of transparency regarding working conditions is still being fought for.

Unfortunately, TDIC (Tourism Development and Investment Company, the agency developing Saadiyat) refused to work with HRW in any form or under any arrangement. TDIC was also provided with a list of six monitoring firms that were recommended by HRW and us. Instead of hiring one of those firms, TDIC hired PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) as the monitor. Members of the GulfLabor Working Committee voiced very strong doubts about PwC's ability to work independently, given the current and future business they transact with government-owned companies in the region. As a compromise, we recommended that PwC work with one of HRW's recommended monitors– this recommendation was not implemented either.

We also introduced TDIC and the Guggenheim to the "Dhaka Principles" devised by the Institute for Human Rights and Business (<http://ihrb.org/>) in consultation with a range of international stakeholders from business, government and civil society, to ensure dignity to migrant workers. We introduced the Guggenheim to key staff at IHRB and requested that IHRB also be involved in the process, but this was not followed up.

PwC was appointed June 1, 2011, and their report was due on June 30, 2012. In this period, we maintained open, friendly communication with the Guggenheim in order to continue to explore any and all possible channels to reach our goals. At the same time we conducted independent visits to Saadiyat, and met workers who confirmed that abuses were ongoing. We had planned to announce a next stage in GulfLabor's action in March 2012, in response to HRW's follow-up report "Island of Happiness Revisited (March, 2012)

<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/03/21/island-happiness-revisited-0>

but deferred this step because we were hopeful that the PwC report would soon be made public. However, to our disappointment, the release of the report was delayed for another three months and finally made public and posted on the TDIC website on the 24th of September.

www.tdic.ae/en/media/get/20120923_TDIC-EPP-Compliance-Monitoring-Sep2012.pdf

On September 28th, some members of the Working Group (the undersigned) met in order to discuss the findings and consider an appropriate response and subsequent steps. We concluded that the-report itself requires closer scrutiny and contains serious issues related to how PwC has chosen to conduct its monitoring. For instance, it already contains within it TDIC's responses and actions to the findings of the report, attempting to mitigate damage and requiring PwC to have first released its findings to TDIC privately. This indicates a level of collaboration that reaffirms our concerns over PwC's neutrality. In addition, there is no indication how many of the site visits were actually "surprise visits" . The report acknowledges that: "The majority of the interviews were scheduled and conducted at the Saadiyat

Island project's construction office" i.e., in close proximity to and with knowledge of employers.

Despite shortcomings, we acknowledge the report being made public as a sign of TDIC exerting effort towards addressing the condition of workers on Saadiyat Island. Importantly, the findings of the monitor validate our initial concerns. The PwC report refers to "significant challenges" faced by contractors to ensure minimum standards to their workers, the still systemic challenges of workers having to pay recruitment fees (75% of the workers) and the difficulty in ensuring minimum living standards, including guaranteeing the quality of drinking water.

The concerns which we had initially raised, and which the report confirms, include:

1. Recruitment fees and relocation costs paid by workers.
2. Poor housing and living conditions, even in the Saadiyat Construction Village.
3. Lack of open platforms for workers to express grievances or abuses

Although TDIC has been made aware of these shortcomings and has taken steps to address some of these issues, significant problems persist. We wish to ensure these steps continue, even once the pressure and public scrutiny generated by the artists' boycott and the two HRW reports subsides. We have requested a follow-up meeting with the Guggenheim, and hope to learn of their response to this report. We will call on them to address these issues with the urgency they require. We would also like to ensure that the Guggenheim and TDIC continue to provide ways to assess the labour situation in a free and unobstructed manner.

HRW contacts have said to us that this artists' campaign is one of the most promising paths for assuring greater reforms for workers in the region, as we hold global institutions accountable for their work there. We feel this is a critical part of a struggle that will impact the lives, experiences, and rights of workers in a broader UAE context.

We would also like to make a wider communication with the public and to give a status update on our campaign but will do so after our meeting with the Guggenheim. As a signatory to the boycott, we welcome your questions, concerns and suggestions with regards to our actions and communications on this matter. (Although we may not be able to respond individually, since there are over 1400 signatories so far).

Sincerely,

Gulf Labor Working Group,
Haig Aivazian
Ayreen Anastas
Doug Ashford
Shaina Anand
Tania Brugera
Sam Durant
Rene Gabri
Mariam Ghani
Hans Haacke
Brian Holmes
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Walid Raad

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Ashok Sukumaran
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