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## U.S. Statement at the UPR of Qatar, 19<sup>th</sup> Session, May 7, 2014

The United States welcomes the Qatari delegation to the UPR Working Group and congratulates Qatar on the completion of its second national report and presentation today.

We are encouraged by the Government of Qatar's recent steps toward hiring 150 labor inspectors since October 2013 and increasing migrants' awareness of their rights. However, we are concerned that the restrictive *kafala* [PRON: ka-FAL-a] system, particularly the no-objection certificate and exit permit provisions, increases workers' vulnerability to exploitation and human trafficking.

We urge continued efforts to prosecute those found violating the labor laws and to strengthen protections for workers' rights such as ensuring that their salaries are paid on time and that their passports are not confiscated in violation of Qatari law.

Separately, we are concerned about the imprisonment of individuals simply for exercising their freedom of expression, as well as by media restrictions and censorship. While we welcome that the draft media law contains positive provisions, including the elimination of criminal penalties for libel, we have concerns that it does not respect freedom of expression.

The United States recommends that the Government of Qatar:

1. Abolish or reform the restrictive sponsorship law, which drives potential labor exploitation and human trafficking; strengthen enforcement of the labor law; continue to increase awareness of human rights of migrant workers; and expand legal protections, particularly for domestic workers who are not covered under the labor law;
2. Release all prisoners of conscience, including poet Mohammed al-Ajami [PRON: AJJ-a-mee], and respect the rights of all individuals to freedom of expression;
3. Consider acceding to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and adopt a new media law that respects freedom of expression.