

**DEFIANCE 009**

# **FIFA'S QATAR WORLD CUP SLAVE LABOUR SHAME**

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## **DEF009 - PETE PATTISSON INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION**

### **FIFA'S QATAR WORLD CUP SLAVE LABOUR SHAME**

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**Peter McCormack: 01:51**

Good morning Pete. How are you?

**Pete Pattison: 01:53**

I'm great. Good morning.

**Peter McCormack: 01:55**

Thank you for coming on the show. Alex said I really needed to talk to you and, as a keen football fan and understanding the research you've done here, I was very keen to do this, so thank you for coming on. Just as a background, just for people who might not know you, listening to my show. I obviously know you're a journalist, but if you can just give it a bit of background of why it is your so focused also on Nepal and then the Qatar World Cup.

**Pete Pattison: 02:17**

Well, I've been documenting the lives of exploited workers for almost 15 years all around the world with a particular focus of victims of modern forms of slavery. And in 2013, I moved to live in Nepal and everyday about a thousand to 1,200 young Nepalis leave the country to work overseas. And so that was an obvious story for me to look at right from

the start. And so ever since 2013, I've been following the lives of these young men who leave Nepal and many of them who go to Qatar, which is obviously host of the next World Cup.

**Peter McCormack: 03:00**

Right? Because this isn't a specific problem just for Nepal though, although you've documented this yourself, there is a problem here for migrant workers across the world.

**Pete Pattison: 03:08**

There's a problem for migrant workers across the world. Obviously, there are huge human flows from poorer countries to richer countries. We're not talking about migration to escape conflict here. We're talking about economic migration, migration to find a better life. Obviously as my reporting has shown, it doesn't always end up like that. But in my region, if you look at a Nepal, Bangladesh, India, hundreds of thousands of young men and women also, leave those countries in search of work and one of the most common destinations are countries in the Gulf. It's certainly not just Qatar. Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, all those countries in the Gulf are receiving hundreds of thousands of young workers. And interestingly, there's also been a significant increase of migrants coming out of parts of Africa, I would say in the last three or four years.

**Peter McCormack: 04:02**

And why is that? Why is there a struggle domestically for them to recruit workers?

**Pete Pattison: 04:06**

In countries in the Gulf?

**Peter McCormack: 04:08**

Yeah.

**Pete Pattison: 04:09**

Well, first of all, countries in the Gulf generally have a very small native population. So for example, Qatar has a total population of about 2.7 million. 2 million of them are migrant workers. It's just a vast migrant work force that far outnumbers the local population. So first of all, there's small local populations. And secondly, the type of work that they want done is not the type of work that Qatari's would be willing to do. These are difficult, dirty, dangerous jobs, often in construction. So these Gulf countries turn to the neighbouring regions for their labour. I mean the interesting thing about Qatar is, by some measures it's the richest country in the world per capita. And so it has everything except cheap labour. And that's why it goes to places like Nepal to source cheap labour.

**Peter McCormack: 05:01**

But I'm guessing, it doesn't actually have to have such cheap labour because in my research I was looking at, it has, what was it, the third largest natural gas and oil reserves. So really is this more of an abusive system than a need for cheap labour.

**Pete Pattison: 05:15**

They could easily pay good wages to these workers. I mean, Qatar is spending about \$500 million every week on preparations for the World Cup. They are not short of

money, but what they're doing is they're pulling in these hundreds of thousands of workers. I mean literally, actually millions. And by and large these workers are being paid very, very low wages. To give an example of that, Qatar recently introduced a sort of provisional minimum wage, which is 750 Qatari riyals a month. That is \$200 a month in the richest country in the world.

**Peter McCormack: 05:54**

Jesus. So hold on. So with that of income, what can they actually afford, living standard wise, because I imagine it's not a cheap place to live.

**Pete Pattison: 06:03**

Yeah. Living standards in the way you imagine, it doesn't really apply to migrant workers because when a migrant worker arrives in a place like Qatar, they are effectively under the control of their employer 24/7.

**Peter McCormack: 06:21**

Is this the Kafala system?

**Pete Pattison: 06:22**

Yeah, I'll get onto that in a sec. They arrive at the airport, they're picked up by their employer. They're taken to a labour camp, which is rented by their employer, they go to work, they come back from work to the labour camp. They have very little free time, and their whole life is tied up with their job. So, living standards and going out having fun, that sort of thing, it doesn't really apply to these workers. And where they do have the opportunity for example, they have one day off a week, a lot of them tell me I just sleep during that day off because they're so tired or you know if they do, there are some local facilities they can go to.

**Peter McCormack: 07:01**

All right. Okay. We should probably work through this in some logical steps. So I'm going to go back a step. Firstly, when did you first uncover these abuses during the Qatar World Cup? Because when I heard about your work, I think I'd been aware of a documentary so I couldn't find it, but perhaps it was the BBC or it was a news article, I think I saw it a couple of years ago where they were reporting on this and there were, at the time, I'd read about passports being stolen and people being held against their will and like a high number of deaths. When were you kind of first aware, what brought you into this?

**Pete Pattison: 07:37**

I've been documenting these kinds of practices since around 2010, but let me tell you how I got into specifically when I was living in Nepal. So being aware that there were problems with migrant workers in the Gulf and that many of them were dying, one summer, summer of 2013, I spent weeks standing outside the arrivals gate of Katmandu's airport and off every flight from the Gulf, hundreds of young men come out pushing trolleys, full of their belongings and sometimes with big flat screen TVs is kind of like a symbol of their success, the migration success, because it is successful for some of them.

**Pete Pattison: 08:17**

But then I'd wait a little bit, wait longer, and something else would come out on those trolleys from the airport, which were coffins carrying the bodies of migrant workers. And I followed one of these coffins back to its village and the coffin carried the body of a young boy called Ganesh Bishwakarma, and it turned out he was just 16 years old and he'd only gone to Qatar a few weeks earlier and he came back and was cremated by his devastated and impoverished family. And that tragic tale of a small boy really set me out on the path to find out what was going on. So after that I went to Qatar to see what was happening there, to find out why young men were dying, to find out why so many were facing so many problems. What I found was not just a case of sudden unexpected deaths, but a system of mass exploitation of migrant workers.

**Peter McCormack: 09:14**

So is this really one of those kind of separate economies that builds up because of the World Cups coming, they've got obviously a deadline to deliver it. Is it just this kind of separate economy that exists in Qatar?

**Pete Pattison: 09:26**

Well, it certainly doesn't exist only in Qatar and it certainly doesn't exist only because of the World Cup. The problems I'm describing exist across the whole Gulf, and they've existed before the World Cup was going to be hosted by Qatar. These Gulf countries have been taking in migrant workers for many years. So it's a long running problem that has just become worse and has attracted much more attention because of the World Cup and because everyone's interested in football.

**Peter McCormack: 09:56**

But who monitors this? Who regulates it? Because if this was happening in the UK, well this just wouldn't happen somewhere like the UK. Is this something that the UN are monitoring?

**Pete Pattison: 10:07**

Well.

**Peter McCormack: 10:08**

Have I got different cultural expectations?

**Pete Pattison: 10:11**

To some extent. I mean obviously you've got the governments in the countries of origin like Nepal or India or Bangladesh, that have various rules and regulations in place regarding the outflow of their migrant workers. Then you have governments in the countries of destination, Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, who also have various rules and regulations regarding the inflow of migrant workers. To say it very in a simple way, these rules and regulations are very weak and they are monitored and enforced very poorly.

**Peter McCormack: 10:46**

Right. Okay. So are they really for show?

**Pete Pattison: 10:51**

Some of them are for show and some of them are implemented poorly because there's profit to be made from this. The reason these workers end up in trouble is because people are making money off the back of them. Maybe I can just kind of go through the steps that these workers all typically go through, which leave them in such a vulnerable condition.

**Peter McCormack: 11:13**

Yeah, that'd probably be very helpful.

**Pete Pattison: 11:15**

What basically happens is that if you're a young man, let's say you're in Bangladesh or Nepal and you want a better prospect, you want a job overseas, you have to pay for that job. The employers in the Gulf don't offer those jobs for free. Now you will have to pay a recruitment agent in your own country, anything from \$1000 up to maybe \$5,000 to secure that job because there's less jobs than there are people wanting the jobs.

**Peter McCormack: 11:42**

But, hold on, if it's \$5,000 for a job and you're earning \$200 a month, hold on, that's five months, that's 25 months you have to work to break even, not accounting for any additional cost.

**Pete Pattison: 11:55**

Absolutely 100% right.

**Peter McCormack: 11:57**

Wow.

**Pete Pattison: 11:59**

In fact, when I was in Qatar last, which was in August, September, I was talking to some young guys from Bangladesh and they said to me, we paid more than \$5,000 for this job, and I have to work for three years just to pay off the cost of the job and the interest associated with it. Now, none of these young men have \$5,000 or \$1,000 sitting around in their pocket. So generally they borrow money to afford that fee at a very, very high interest rate, sometimes 36, 60% and so before they've even left home, they are deep in debt. And as you say, they're going to spend years often just paying off their debt before they're actually only even earning money. And that debt, makes them very vulnerable to exploitation because they have an obligation to pay it back.

**Pete Pattison: 12:47**

So even if the conditions they find themselves working in are atrocious, they feel obliged, they feel tied to continue working in them because they've got a huge debt to pay off. But that's only the first step, Peter, it gets worse than that.

**Pete Pattison: 13:02**

So once these guys have paid some money and they've secured the job, they'll sign a contract, right? They signed a job contract. Sometimes it's not in a language they understand and sometimes it is. Typically, they only actually receive the paper contract

hours before they leave home, and when I say home, I mean the airport in their country. I mean often I've seen them literally pick up their contracts at the airport departure gate. Now time and again, the details on that contract, particularly the salary they were promised and the actual job they were promised, are different. But when you've already paid a large amount of money, you said goodbye to your family, you're at the airport gate with the ticket in hand, it's too late.

**Pete Pattison: 13:43**

So these guys just shrug their shoulders and they think, okay, well I'm just going to get on the plane and hopefully it's going to work itself out. So, that's the kind of a second stage of exploitation they face. It's often called contract substitution. And then arrive in the country of destination. Let's say it's Doha has international airport and the very first thing their employer does is take their passport. Now, that's illegal, but it's widespread practice. And when you think about it, think if someone was holding your passport Peter, they would have this huge amount of control over you. You-

**Peter McCormack: 14:18**

Of course.

**Pete Pattison: 14:19**

You couldn't do a whole lot of things because they have that passport. It's not just the fact that you couldn't travel outside of the country. It's the fact that if you do anything that they deem to be inappropriate or illegal or wrong in a place like Qatar, the employer can just give the passport to the police and you're suddenly you're in their hands.

**Peter McCormack: 14:36**

But isn't it also illegal for you not to be holding ID?

**Pete Pattison: 14:39**

You do have ID in Qatar. There's a separate ID card. It's not the same as your passport. Although that's a whole other issue because often workers don't get their ID card or if leave their job because of exploitation and abuse, they lose their ID card and they can't get a new ID card. So there's a whole other issue about holding documentation that is necessary.

**Pete Pattison: 15:02**

And then I would say the last step, the most significant step, is that every single worker in Qatar and in fact across most countries in the Gulf, are subject to an employment system that's known as Kafala. Kafala means sponsorship. And under this system workers are tied to their employer so that they cannot leave their job and they cannot leave the country without their employer's permission. So it's a kind of deep corruption of the basic understanding of a labour market where the free movement of labour allows people to go and find better jobs. And if you think about it from the point of view of an employer, if you know that your employees cannot leave, whatever you do to them, where's the incentive to treat them right?

**Pete Pattison: 15:47**

And so when you put together these four issues. You do recruitment debt, contract substitution, passport confiscation, the Kafala system, you have this really potent and terrifying mix that leaves tens of thousands of young men vulnerable to modern forms of slavery, forced labour, bonded labour.

**Peter McCormack: 16:08**

It just sounds like a very abusive system.

**Pete Pattison: 16:10**

It's a very abusive system. I mean, people say, well look, at least these young men have a chance to go to Qatar and earn some money. No. The situation in Qatar, the system in Qatar is actually a trap, it's not a route out of poverty.

**Peter McCormack: 16:24**

Yeah. Okay. So there's a lot to unpack there, but before I do that, I also therefore think we should also cover the actual working conditions themselves because this is the thing that's drawn me to it. Look, Pete, I'm a huge football fan. I absolutely love the World Cup, but we're talking thousands of people have died, right?

**Pete Pattison: 16:42**

Yes.

**Peter McCormack: 16:43**

And it just feels to me that, I don't know, I feel very ashamed and feel like when 2022 comes around, I don't know, I feel like I won't want to watch this World Cup because of the amount of people who've had to die for it to be delivered. So do you know that total number of people who've died?

**Pete Pattison: 17:04**

That question should be easy to answer. To some extent it is, in other ways, it isn't. The first thing, let's put a little bit of context to this. Qatar is hosting the World Cup. The numbers of workers employed in building World Cup stadium themselves is relatively small, about 30,000. It's less than 2% of the entire migrant workforce in Qatar. However, the number of workers employed in building infrastructure to support the World Cup, new airport, new roads, new hotels and so on and so on, is huge. We're talking to the tens of thousands here. So it's important to identify the difference between World Cup stadium workers and general workers. But even large numbers of the general workers are involved building infrastructure for the World Cup. Now, every year hundreds of migrant workers die in Qatar, and the majority of these deaths are identified as due to natural causes, typically associated with cardiac failure or respiratory failure.

**Pete Pattison: 18:09**

Now, Qatar's therefore somewhat dismissed these deaths as, people die. We've got 2 million migrant workers, some of them die. There's two problems with that. The first problem is that I found out recently that in the vast majority of cases the Qatari authorities do not carry out autopsies when migrant workers die. They just do an external examination of the body. Now, any forensic expert will tell you that an external

examination of the body is not sufficient to determine the cause of death. In other words, we don't really know why hundreds of migrant workers are dying in Qatar. And secondly, there's been recent research that has shown a very close correlation between the number of migrant workers dying and the hottest months of the year. In other words, we can say fairly confidently that one of the reasons why migrant workers are dying is because of the extreme heat they work under.

**Pete Pattison: 19:05**

I don't know if you've been to the Gulf, but, May through to October, the heat outside from very early in the morning, even I would say 7:00 AM is unbearable. If you've ever been in a sauna, it would be literally like doing hard manual labour in a sauna. So clearly the heat is a factor here. And what's interesting is after my first report came out for the Guardian and 2013, I'm a freelancer, but I write for the Guardian. After my first report came out, the Qatari authorities commissioned a major international law firm to investigate my findings. And the law firm largely backed up everything I said. And one of their recommendations was that the Qatari authorities should commission independent research into the cause of deaths of migrant workers. That was in 2014. Five years later, the Qatari authorities have still not-

**Pete Pattison: 20:03**

Five years later, the Qatari authorities have still not done that.

**Peter McCormack: 20:05**

Okay. Are any of these deaths preventable? For example, could the work be carried out at nighttime? Could better hydration be provided? Have you looked into this at all?

**Pete Pattison: 20:18**

Yes, we've looked into this and actually the ILO, the UN body, International Labor Organisation in collaboration with the country authorities have recently looked into it as well. And what they found was that due to the extreme heat, migrant workers are very vulnerable to heat stress during the hottest months of the year. Now, there is a regulation in Qatar and in other countries in the Gulf that between... It varies between different countries, but roughly between 11 AM and 3 PM during the hottest part of the year, workers are not allowed to work outside in direct sunlight.

**Pete Pattison: 20:59**

But the research that we did, and in fact the research that the ILO did, showed that this summertime working ban is not sufficient to protect workers. And even outside of these hours, they're exposed to extreme heat, which leaves them, potentially leaves them vulnerable to heat stress, to kidney problems and to other things that may be partly responsible for this number of deaths.

**Peter McCormack: 21:27**

What is life like for normal Qatari residents? Is there certain things, certain ways to adapt to this heat?

**Pete Pattison: 21:35**

The average Qatari lives in a parallel life to the average migrant worker. They are very



unlikely to ever interact with them. Their experience in the country is totally different to them. And so in terms of the heat, they would just spend the whole time in air conditioning. These workers, there may be air conditioning, there will be air conditioning in their labour camps. But as soon as they are working, they have to face up to this really searing summer heat. It's hard to exaggerate how hot it is.

**Peter McCormack: 22:14**

And do you know what kind of hydration they're provided with or what they're provided with to reduce the risk of, I'm going to say death, but reduce the risk of illness or the effects of the heat? Are they provided with regular water, regular breaks? Is it 15 minutes on, 15 minutes off or is it nothing?

**Pete Pattison: 22:34**

Nothing. Water is generally available at construction sites or for example, men who are working on landscaping, water's generally available. But it's interesting. This research that the ILO commission shows that for workers not on World Cup stadium, the research showed that 74% of them suffered from dehydration at the end of every shift, which you know is obviously a very significant factor.

**Pete Pattison: 22:59**

And what the ILO's research and our research also showed is that the measures that are being taken both in terms of reducing the working hours out in the extreme heat and in terms of things like availability of water are not sufficient to protect them. I mean, really you got to be really blunt and really strict about it. Nobody should be working outside at any time during the hottest summer months.

**Peter McCormack: 23:24**

But it sounds to me like even outside of those months, there's still risk.

**Pete Pattison: 23:28**

No, what I'm saying is even outside of the official hours when people are not supposed to be working, there are still risks.

**Peter McCormack: 23:37**

Yeah. That's what I mean. So it's like it's a very high risk environment anyway. And it feels like they're just pushing the limits. And is this because of a lack of care or is it more because of the deadlines, because you can't miss the launch of the World Cup, right? Or is it just a combination of it all?

**Pete Pattison: 23:54**

It's a combination of economic factors. Companies have contracts to complete, and for that they need workers to work. Obviously, there's a tight deadline in terms of getting everything ready for the World Cup. But, Peter, the real issue behind this in my opinion, is that the Qatari authorities don't view migrant workers as real human beings.

**Peter McCormack: 24:18**

Wow, okay.

**Pete Pattison: 24:18**

They see them as disposable. And so when you have a system that is based on the premise that these migrant workers are kind of subhuman, that they're disposable, then that excuses anything. I mean, if, let's say, hundreds of Westerners or hundreds of Qataris were dying every year because of... down to unknown reasons, there would be an outrage. This would be considered an emergency. So why don't we view it like that when they're Nepali, or they're Indian, or they're Kenyan?

**Peter McCormack: 24:55**

And I guess what you're saying there is, when you say we, it's not only the Qataris but it's anybody attached to football or understands what's going on with the World Cup. Because, me as a fan, I should care. FIFA should care. The English FA should care. But it just seems like this is being ignored.

**Pete Pattison: 25:16**

I agree with you. I think there has been some progress and I can talk about that.

**Peter McCormack: 25:22**

Yeah.

**Pete Pattison: 25:23**

I have seen very little, for example, from FIFA that shows any inclination or interest in taking serious steps to address this issue. The Qatari authorities have begun to show some willingness to do things differently, but that's followed a huge amount of pressure partly from the media, partly from human rights organisations, and also partly from the UN. So I would say there has been a small amount of progress, but it's come very late and it's minimal and it's glacial.

**Peter McCormack: 25:59**

Okay. So what progress has been made? What have you noticed?

**Pete Pattison: 26:03**

Okay, so last month, the Qataris announced some major reforms and they're the type of reforms that I've been advocating for as have others for quite a long time. Specifically they said they would effectively abolish the kafala system and they would allow workers to leave their jobs and leave the country if they wish to do so. And they would introduce a minimum wage, which would be the first of its kind in the Gulf.

**Peter McCormack: 26:31**

Okay.

**Pete Pattison: 26:32**

If these reforms are implemented, they could represent a significant improvement in working conditions in Qatar and they would be a real victory for all those who have been demanding better rights for workers there. The proposed reforms do not solve all the problems, and there are big question marks about how far and how well they will be implemented.

**Peter McCormack: 27:00**

Well, the thing I was going to say there is that even with the removal of the kafala system, a number of the workers are still going to be in a position where they're indebted. So even if they have the freedom to leave, essentially they're still economically trapped. I had read about also there is an essentially a grievance process if you want to make a complaint but people are too scared to use it. So it feels like there needs to be better regulation or a better system set up for the actual protection of the workers whilst they're there.

**Pete Pattison: 27:33**

Yes, correct. I mean you're absolutely right. The reforms that the Qataris have announced, only if they are properly implemented, will only solve some of the problems. Workers are still likely to arrive deep in debt, which as I said, makes them vulnerable to exploitation. There are mechanisms, grievance mechanisms in place. As I understand it, they are getting better but they are still not accessible enough, they are not quick enough and they are not effective enough. I mean Amnesty put out a report a couple of months ago highlighting three major cases where workers had been waiting months and months to get paid, and that indicates that the grievance system is not working very well.

**Peter McCormack: 28:16**

Yes, because the delay in being paid is also another problem. I mean, what's happening there? Why are people not being paid?

**Pete Pattison: 28:22**

So if you talk to any workers, whatever you want to talk about, they want to talk about something else, and that is pay. They will always talk about pay, low pay, late pay, quite often, no pay. And here's the thing. Here's the thing that I find interesting, if workers were just paid a decent wage on time, the vast majority of the problems in the Gulf that affect migrant workers would be solved. They're willing to put up with difficult conditions, they're willing to put up with squalid accommodation as long as they paid on time.

**Pete Pattison: 28:56**

And the reason they want to get paid on time is obviously they want to earn money, but they're also obliged to pay off their debt and they've got family back home who are relying on them for all their basic needs. And so pay is probably the number one problem.

**Pete Pattison: 29:09**

So if Qatar actually introduces a decent minimum wage, which I'm not confident they will do, that would represent a significant step forward. But time and again, pay is the problem. And you asked why is it the problem? I don't think there's many employers in the Gulf who wake up in the morning and say, "I don't want to pay my workers today." It's not that. I think it's tied to some extent to bigger economic issues.

**Pete Pattison: 29:35**

The cashflow system within the construction sector in the Gulf is problematic. There's so

many steps of sub-contraction so that if the person with the money pays late, then the first contractor pays late and the sub-contractor pays late, and the sub sub contractor pays late and the worker is always the one who suffers at the end.

**Peter McCormack: 29:53**

But surely the Qatari government has enough, has the resources to solve this. I mean, people not being paid, I think comes with a lot of risk itself. Right? I mean that's additional stress. And also, how are they economically surviving? Are they provided with food while they're there or do they have to buy that out of the money they earn? How does that work?

**Pete Pattison: 30:13**

It depends on the contract. Some contracts, food is provided by the employer. In others, they are given a kind of food allowance and they cook their own food. It just depends on the employer. Yes, in extreme cases, workers end up with very little cash and find a struggle to get by in basics. Although what typically happens is workers visit certain local shops to buy basic goods and they kind of run a credit system in their shops. I've seen ledgers in these shops with the names of the workers and long lists of expenses that they've incurred, which then they have to pay back if and when they eventually get paid.

**Peter McCormack: 30:54**

Wow, that's... Well, okay. Again, there's a lot to take in here. So the first thing to solve is would be having people paid on time. That sounds like that's complicated and in the short term doesn't sound like something that will be solved. You said there were three items that Amnesty raised. What were the other two?

**Pete Pattison: 31:12**

No, I said they're focused on three cases, three big cases-

**Peter McCormack: 31:17**

Oh, three cases.

**Pete Pattison: 31:17**

... of well-established companies which had not paid workers for a long time. I actually visited one of those companies and I went into the labour camps where those workers were and they had not been paid, I think they had not been paid for about six months.

**Pete Pattison: 31:35**

And you know, there's another aspect to this. When you don't get paid for six months, your family becomes desperate and they begin to suspect. These workers tell me, "Pete, sometimes my families, they don't trust me. They think I'm just collecting all this money and then I'm not sending it back to them." This huge issue, which is never talked in Qatari, which is the mental health of these workers, the mental pressure they're under to pay back their debt, to earn money, to send money back to their families. It's a very, very difficult environment for them.

**Peter McCormack: 32:10**

And I'm guessing there's very little mental health support, if any. I mean what kind of medical facilities are these workers provided with?

**Pete Pattisson: 32:19**

Actually, you might be surprised to know the medical facilities are quite good, and I know that because I visited two of them a few months ago. There are a number of medical camps that are set up specifically for workers, and they're quite close to the major camps where the workers live. And I mean, the first thing to say is these medical facilities are full. When you go there, there are thousands of workers trying to get treatment. In fact, one nurse told me that they receive about 2,500 workers in every 24 hours, which he said was more than the major hospital in Doha receives.

**Pete Pattisson: 32:57**

And also the treatment in these hospitals, if you have a, what's called a health card, is virtually free. So there are medical facilities available. Workers can access them relatively easily, but there's problems as well.

**Pete Pattisson: 33:13**

Let me give an example. When I was in Qatar last time, I met a group of workers who had not been issued with a health card by their employer. Now if you don't have the health card, you cannot get free or very cheap healthcare at these medical centres. Secondly, they told me their employer doesn't let them go to these medical centres if they're sick. And I said, "So what do they do?" And they say, "Oh, they just give us an aspirin."

**Peter McCormack: 33:35**

Oh my god.

**Pete Pattisson: 33:35**

So there are these rogue employers and many of them who are really only concerned about their own bottom line, and they're not concerned about the health and welfare of their workers.

**Peter McCormack: 33:49**

Are they making good money or are they under their own financial pressures?

**Pete Pattisson: 33:53**

I think they're under their own financial pressures.

**Peter McCormack: 33:55**

Right. Okay. I see.

**Pete Pattisson: 33:57**

I don't think Qatar is the promise land for a construction company, and that's part of the problem.

**Peter McCormack: 34:04**

But all the money's coming in from the top, right, from the Qatari government?

**Pete Pattison: 34:08**

Not all of it.

**Peter McCormack: 34:10**

No?

**Pete Pattison: 34:10**

A lot of it is obviously for the major construction, but there's a big private sector there as well. And so I think the money's coming from both sides.

**Peter McCormack: 34:18**

Okay. When you go back to the pay, you said one thing that would help would be the implementation of a, I guess you're saying a fair minimum wage. Is there any kind of study about what a fair wage would be?

**Pete Pattison: 34:31**

Well, the International Labor Organisation say that the minimum wage they're going to recommend is based on research. They're not just randomly picking out a number. At the moment, the minimum wage is, like I said, \$200 a month. Workers I have spoken to and workers' groups I've spoken to expect a minimum of \$400 a month, which even that you would think is hardly a high wage at all.

**Peter McCormack: 35:02**

But it's relative, right?

**Pete Pattison: 35:04**

Well, yes, sure.

**Peter McCormack: 35:05**

Like it seems low to us, but I don't know what an average wage in Nepal is itself.

**Pete Pattison: 35:10**

Yeah. I mean, this is the weird thing actually. A lot of the salaries these workers are getting in the Gulf are not significantly higher than what they could get in Nepal. And when you tie in all the other factors like the cost of recruitment they have to pay, they don't necessarily come back to Nepal with a healthy bank balance.

**Pete Pattison: 35:33**

The other point I'd make is this, even if a reasonable minimum wage is introduced in Qatar, the question is, will it actually be implemented? Will receivers actually receive that wage? So let me give an example. When I was in Qatar recently, I walked past a construction site, and I noticed that the men were wearing the logo of a British construction company or an affiliate of a British construction company. So I went to talk to them and I said, "How much are you earning?" And they said, "We're earning 625 rials a month," which is well below the minimum wage of 750.

**Pete Pattisson: 36:14**

And I said, "You know, that's below the minimum wage?" And they said, "Yeah, we know but there's nothing we can do about it." So I came back to the UK and I started to phone up people in that British construction company. That was, what, a month ago, six weeks ago maybe. And I have been phoning, I have been emailing, I have been talking to them and I still haven't got any response back.

**Pete Pattisson: 36:36**

Here, you've got a major British construction company. Its joint venture partner in the Gulf is breaking the law. More and more significantly, its joint venture partner in the Gulf is paying a wage that is so low as... There's no ethics, there's no reason that you could justify that low wage, and they are not showing any urgency in trying to address this. So if you've got a top tier company that is just turning a blind eye to the minimum wage, how easy will it be for lower rung smaller companies to get away with doing the same? Very easy in my opinion.

**Peter McCormack: 37:14**

Okay. Interesting. Was there any risks to you traveling out there and doing this research? Because I did read that there were... I think it might have been an Amnesty report that said taking photographs or visiting some of the labour camps itself was illegal.

**Pete Pattisson: 37:27**

Yeah, it's a really good question. There is a risk involved, but I would qualify in two ways. First of all, any risk that I would face in going to Qatar is very small and minimal compared to the risks many of the workers face in their day to day work. Having said that, Qatar is an authoritarian regime. They have no free press. There are no trade unions. There's no political opposition. There's virtually no civil society. They are not used to being questioned and held to account.

**Pete Pattisson: 37:55**

So when my first report came out in 2013, I think that was a real big reality check from them. They didn't realise that along with hosting the World Cup, you also get a huge amount of a media pressure. So unfortunately, they haven't managed it very well because I know at least, I would say at least 10 journalists, who have either been detained or arrested or expelled for investigating this issue in Qatar. It hasn't happened to me, but-

**Peter McCormack: 38:31**

Any of them mistreated?

**Pete Pattisson: 38:35**

I would say being detained for doing journalism is mistreatment. But no, when I read the accounts of what they've gone through, it's clearly pretty terrifying for them. And when they get released from detention, all of them go straight to the airport and leave the country. But my point is this, if you host the World Cup, you shouldn't be detaining

journalists or human rights activists for investigating the conditions of the workers building your World Cup.

**Pete Pattison: 39:09**

This international sporting events should be run in a more transparent way than that. And I know for a fact that these stories of journalists being detained have put off people going to Qatar or made them a little careful about going. And I myself am careful. When I go to Qatar, maybe to interview workers, for the last few times I've gone, all my interviews took place in the back of my car with the lights turned out because I don't want to draw attention to myself and I don't want to draw attention to the workers that I'm talking to.

**Peter McCormack: 39:50**

I'm surprised they're not stopping you at the airport though now or following you.

**Pete Pattison: 39:55**

Well, what can I say? I'm a little surprise myself.

**Peter McCormack: 39:58**

Yeah. Okay. I mean you didn't properly answer the question when I said do you know how many have been...

**Peter McCormack: 40:03**

I mean, you didn't properly answer the question when I said, "Do you know how many people have actually died in the construction?" Because I guess getting to the number is quite hard. I've seen some various numbers and it seems to me like it's a few thousand but there's not an exact number. I'm not going to say a few thousand. I'm saying it seems to be somewhere between kind of 3 to 10,000 that I could find. Is that a fair range or is that too broad?

**Pete Pattison: 40:25**

No, that's inaccurate.

**Peter McCormack: 40:28**

Okay.

**Pete Pattison: 40:28**

Last year, just among the World Cup stadiums specifically, 11 workers died. One worker died through a workplace accident and 10 workers died in what the Supreme Committee, that's what they call themselves, the committee organising the World Cup, their official name is Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy. 10 workers died through non work-related deaths. They define them as non work-related. And what that means is they died offsite, typically in the labour camp. But as I've explained earlier, we can't say for sure whether those deaths were work-related or not. I mean if it was due to heat stress, they could easily die at the end of their shift.

**Pete Pattison: 41:15**

So, personally I would see that as quite a significant number of deaths. If you're talking



about let's say 10 workers a year for five, six, seven years that they're building World Cup stadiums. It's quite a large number. But the important point is this. There are tens of thousands of more workers building the infrastructure for the World Cup. Like I said, roads, hotels, airports, and the number of workers among them is much higher who are dying. I haven't got a figure off the top of my head, but it's in the hundreds every year. Maybe about 250 Nepalis, more Indians, similar number of Bangladeshis. So, every year it's in the hundreds.

**Peter McCormack: 42:03**

So on the website International Observatory Of Human Rights, they estimated it could be up to 4,000 deaths before the start of the 2022 World Cup. I mean, again, there's different figures, but the broad range of, again, from the various websites I've seen, or maybe from what you've seen, we're talking hundreds to thousands.

**Pete Pattison: 42:25**

That figure was a figure based on the number of people who had died in the preceding years. And then it was applied to the period from about 2013 to up to the World Cup. And I would say that figure's broadly accurate. If you take all the number of workers who died in Qatar between 2013 up to the World Cup, if the number of deaths remains fairly consistent, it would be around that figure. Yes.

**Peter McCormack: 42:50**

So that's a lot of people dying to deliver a World Cup. I mean, to me... The reason I'm coming to this number is, and it may feel like a very unfair comparison, but if you look at the number of people who died say on September the 11th with those attacks, obviously those attacks were a terrorist attack. And it was dramatic and awful. But when you actually just look at the number of lives lost, it was around 3000 I think at September 11th. And we're talking about 4,000 people, of which I don't know how many are unnecessary. What would be a realistic number of people dying? But we're talking thousands dying to deliver a World Cup. This to me is a scandal. And what I can't understand is why I'm not seeing more of this in the media.

**Pete Pattison: 43:35**

Yeah, it's easy to discuss this in a black and white way. It's tempting to do that. And I don't want to do that because if you look at those 4,000, let's work on an assumption of 4,000. A lot of them are dying from, believe it or not, road traffic accidents. People come from countries where big roads and fast vehicles are not very common. A significant number die from suicides. Then you have a significant number that die from workplace accidents. And then you have a significant number that die from these so called natural causes. Workplace accidents, obviously, totally unacceptable. Natural causes is just a big unknown because the Qatar authorities refuse to investigate it.

**Pete Pattison: 44:20**

So either way, while the issue is not black and white, and I don't want to paint as such, I agree with your general conclusion that yes, this is a tragedy, this is unacceptable, and it's largely unexplained because the country has refused to investigate it. Now, the thing about being an authoritarian regime and a wealthy authoritarian regime is that you have no excuse for not investigating an issue like this. You can't say, "Well, we don't have the

money. It's going to cost too much." I mean, you have the money, so go out there and find out what the problem is because that's the only way we're going to solve it.

**Peter McCormack: 44:54**

But obviously they don't seem to care enough. So really does this fall on FIFA? Should this be FIFA's responsibility and what could FIFA be doing or should they be doing?

**Pete Pattison: 45:05**

I have seen, I may be wrong, but I've seen almost no evidence of FIFA speaking out on this issue or indeed any issue regarding workers' rights in Qatar. They are the voice that is not being heard and in theory they are one of the most powerful voices because this is after all their event. It's not actually called the World Cup is it? It's called the FIFA World Cup. So of all the actors who have been involved in this issue, concerned about workers' rights, my feeling is that they have been the least active or the least effective, when actually they should be the ones being the most vocal in terms of reforms.

**Peter McCormack: 45:44**

Have you talked to FIFA?

**Pete Pattison: 45:46**

I haven't engaged with FIFA much, no. No. Most of my work has been focused on the Qataris and the other organisations that are working specifically on the issue.

**Peter McCormack: 45:56**

And have you tried to? Is it because your focus is elsewhere or there's been a reluctance for anyone at FIFA to talk to you?

**Pete Pattison: 46:02**

No, I haven't particularly tried. People have, I haven't particularly tried, no.

**Peter McCormack: 46:06**

It's been a very strange World Cup itself in the way it was won. I think it was a big surprise. It's a very strange country to award a World Cup to. The fact that it can't really be played in the summer due to the heat conditions for players. It's a very strange World Cup. I don't know if you get that feeling.

**Pete Pattison: 46:24**

Well, yeah. The thing that strikes me is that there is not a huge soccer fan base, or even sporting fan base in Qatar. I mean if you watch the Athletics World Championships, that was self-evident. If you watch any local Qatari clubs playing football, the stadiums are pretty much empty. So there's not a huge local demand for big sporting events. And that's because essentially the countries see these big events as a way to exercise soft power. As a way to get their name and their profile out there around the world. It's not for a love of football, it's for a love of reputation.

**Peter McCormack: 47:09**

Yeah. I wonder what the legacy will be and what will happen to these stadiums afterwards. Because we've seen where countries have hosted World Cups or Olympics.

I mean I saw, I think there's a documentary about what happened in Greece after they hosted the World Cup and what happened to the various venues that were built and a lot of them went into kind of disrepair or ruin. I kind of wonder what happened in Qatar because I can't see what they will have a need for... How many stadiums is it? Seven or eight?

**Pete Pattison: 47:37**

It's eight stadiums. Seven new ones and one refurbished one.

**Peter McCormack: 47:40**

So you can see a demand for a national stadium, but I can't understand what the need will be for these other seven stadiums after the World Cup.

**Pete Pattison: 47:48**

I know, I know. And if you go to Qatar, the stadiums are really, really close together, which the Qataris sell as a strong point. It's going to be the most accessible World Cup in the world, which kind of understand the argument to some extent. But like I said, Qatar is a tiny country. Local population of about 700,000 with eight huge stadiums. It is hard to see how they're going to be used. I mean I've heard that some of the plans for the stadiums that some of the stadiums will be dismantled and rebuilt or that the seating will be given to other countries around the world. But yes, it's hard to see that there's going to be a longterm legacy for this World Cup. Which goes back to my point, this World Cup is not really about playing football, it's about playing politics.

**Peter McCormack: 48:38**

Okay, so what would you like to see happen, Pete? Obviously you're a journalist and you're reporting on this. What do you think should be happening? What do you think could happen?

**Pete Pattison: 48:47**

The first thing to say would be, Qatar has announced some reforms. It'll be very interesting to see how those reforms are implemented. And even if they are implemented well, whether that will really change the circumstances of workers there. I mean you talk about a legacy of the World Cup in terms of football. I'm quite interested to see what will the legacy of the World Cup be in terms of workers' rights. Will kafala really be abolished in Qatar? Will other countries in the region look to Qatar and say, "Well look, they're making progress on workers' rights. We need to do the same." If the legacy of the World Cup is better protections for migrant workers, then I think the World Cup will have achieved something great. If not, the question is what will it have achieved?

**Peter McCormack: 49:41**

Right, but it is to me still a scandal right now and it feels like people should be aware of this. It feels like FIFA should be responding to this. It feels like one of those situations also whereby sponsors should be aware and the pressure perhaps should be put onto the sponsors themselves for them to understand what's happening in Qatar.

**Pete Pattison: 50:03**

Yeah, I totally agree with you. Although I saw something interesting this week that relates precisely to that point. Last year I went to Qatar and investigated one of the most luxurious hotels in the Emirate, which is the Marsa Malaz Kempinski Hotel. I mean this is a hotel that's basically is sort of a fairytale palace. The grandeur and scale of it is unimaginable. And I interviewed men and women who worked at that hotel and they told me terrible stories about the hours they have to work, the conditions they have to work in, the heat they have to work under, the pay they get or in fact that they don't get and I wrote a report on it. And then as you know, in December, the Club World Cup will be held in Qatar and Liverpool's going to play there. They're going to join in I think at the semifinal stage and the final stage.

**Peter McCormack: 50:55**

Haven't they rejected the hotel?

**Pete Pattison: 50:57**

Precisely. And that's the hotel that I did the investigation on.

**Peter McCormack: 51:00**

Interesting. See I saw that this morning when I was just reading, but I didn't read the detail, but what was going on there and why have they rejected it?

**Pete Pattison: 51:07**

Because they read my report.

**Peter McCormack: 51:08**

Wow. Okay.

**Pete Pattison: 51:09**

They didn't want to be staying at a hotel where workers had paid huge amounts of money to secure their jobs, where workers were being paid below minimum wage, where workers were on very, very long shifts, often standing out in the heat. And so they said, "Right, we're not going to stay there." And you know, I applaud them for that. It's an example of... Well, I mean, a football club is kind of a company, isn't it? It's an example of a company taking its obligations to workers seriously. And if other companies could do the same, that would create significant pressure for change.

**Peter McCormack: 51:51**

But wouldn't it be more interesting if Liverpool boycotted the Ball Club Championships because of this? I know that's a lot to ask, but...

**Pete Pattison: 52:00**

Yeah, you're asking me a question above my pay grade. I mean, given the extent and the severity of the exploitation across the Gulf. Given the fact that tens of thousands of workers are basically working under a form of state sponsored slavery. And I don't say that lightly. It's easy to use that word lightly. I don't say it lightly. Given that hundreds of workers are dying and the authorities are not investigating the cause of those deaths. Given that workers are working long shifts for very low pay. Then certainly big

companies, big organisations, big football clubs should be asking those questions. You know, is this something we want to be part of?

**Peter McCormack: 52:47**

Okay. So this interview will go out and go out to my listeners. What kind of response would you like to see? And what message would you like them to take away from this?

**Pete Pattison: 52:58**

Look, there's a range of actors that can exert pressure for reform and to some extent, potentially they've had an impact. The media and the football community have shown interest in this issue. I think they could exert a lot more pressure. The average football fan as well as big football clubs need to be putting more pressure, particularly on FIFA and say, "This is not good enough." Or, "We don't want to be part of a tainted World Cup." This is the sport that we love. We want to see the workers that are helping the World Cup be a success protected properly. That message is getting out. There are signs that it's having an impact. But it could be more powerful. There could be more people involved and they could be speaking out louder.

**Peter McCormack: 53:44**

Okay. And what's next for you in this? Where are you heading with this story now?

**Pete Pattison: 53:51**

Well I could tell you, but then I'd have to shoot you.

**Peter McCormack: 53:55**

But I guess this is something you're going to be focused on all the way up to the World Cup, right?

**Pete Pattison: 53:58**

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I'll just flag up two things. I met a young man when I was there a couple of months ago called Rupchandra Rumba. Sorry, let me rephrase that. I learned of a young man called Rupchandra Rumba a 24 year old construction worker from Nepal. He had been working for two or three months at one of the new stadiums, Education City, and he died in his labour camp suddenly one night during the period he was working at the World Cup stadium. He a wife and a young son, six year old son, and neither of them have received any compensation from Qatar following his death.

**Peter McCormack: 54:37**

Okay.

**Pete Pattison: 54:39**

In fact, his wife told me that, "I did receive \$590." I said, "Where did that come from?" And she said, "My husband's coworkers all donated whatever they could afford and they sent it to me."

**Peter McCormack: 54:55**

That's unbelievable.

**Pete Pattison: 54:57**

Well, that's what I thought. But here's the thing, Peter. It's not a one off case. Workers who are dying in Qatar, including those at the World Cup stadium, their families are not getting compensated when they die. And one of the reasons they're not getting compensated is because the authorities say, "Well, these guys are dying in the labour camp. They're not dying on the work construction site. And therefore we have no legal or financial obligation to their families."

**Pete Pattison: 55:29**

I think this is an outrage. It's unacceptable under any moral code, particularly when the country you're talking about is the richest country in the world, and it has no shortage of money to send to these families, who are now... Rupchandra Rumba's wife now has no husband, no income, and no compensation. And when I met her with her son in Katmandu, she said to me like, "My boy, my six year old boy keeps asking one question. Where's my dad?"

**Peter McCormack: 56:03**

That's heartbreaking.

**Pete Pattison: 56:03**

Yeah, it's heartbreaking. The other issue I would say that is important to understand is really at the root of all of this. Which is that the Qatari authorities, the authorities in Dubai and Saudi, generally speaking, as I've said earlier, they do not view these workers as human. They think they're disposable. I was talking to a Nepali man who had worked in Qatar for a long time and he said to me, "Pete, you know, there's no human rights in Qatar because there's no humanity in Qatar."

**Pete Pattison: 56:35**

And I think what he meant was that the authorities there don't view the workers as human. And there is a system of barely disguised racism that underpins this exploitation. At some levels it's actually written in law. For example, in Qatar there are parts of the country that are designated as family zones and migrant workers are not allowed to live there. It's a legal form of segregation. There are parks, there are shopping malls, there are tourist attractions that migrant workers are not allowed to go into. I've seen them with my own eyes be kicked out. And the excuse for kicking them out is that, well, these places are just for families. But the funny thing is when I as a single white man go into them, nobody stops me.

**Pete Pattison: 57:19**

And the third most obvious example of this is just the widespread exploitation. You cannot have a form of state sponsored slavery. You cannot have so many deaths that are un-investigated. You cannot have so many examples of low, late, or no pay unless you view these workers as sort of sub-human. And so, slavery still exists in Qatar and slavery still exists across the Gulf for the same reason it has always existed throughout history, which is one race thinks they're superior to another race.

**Peter McCormack: 57:53**

Wow. Well this has been a real eye opener and I think people listening to this are going

to want to follow your work and follow how you continue to report. And so what's the best way for people to follow you, Pete?

**Pete Pattison: 58:04**

I'm maybe the only journalist in the world who doesn't have a Twitter account.

**Peter McCormack: 58:08**

What? That's unbelievable.

**Pete Pattison: 58:11**

But you could just Google my work. Follow my work on The Guardian.

**Peter McCormack: 58:15**

Okay, well listen, I do really appreciate your time on this. I think it's valuable work. I wasn't aware, again, that this was happening until Alex mentioned it and obviously we met in New York. I've read all your articles on The Guardian about it. I will share them out in the show notes and I commend you for what you're doing and please keep doing it and I hope I can obviously raise a little more awareness with this show.

**Pete Pattison: 58:35**

Yeah, that would be great because you know the more people understand what's going on, the more pressure that can be brought to bear and the more chance of real change.

**Peter McCormack: 58:43**

Brilliant. Well listen, look, best of luck with this and again thank you for coming on.

**Pete Pattison: 58:47**

Not at all. It's so nice to speak to you.