

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

GULF LABOR RESPONSE TO PwC 2013 REPORT ON TDIC AND THEIR  
EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

New York, February 4, 2014

View the complete PwC report [here](#)

From its outset, the Gulf Labor Coalition has urged TDIC (Tourism Development & Investment Company of Abu Dhabi) to appoint an independent monitor to audit labor conditions on Saadiyat Island. Since PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers) audits the books of companies whose subsidiaries are involved in construction on the island, its business in the UAE is dependent on good relations with state authorities. As a result, PwC's findings will always lack full credibility. A truly independent monitor would not have such ties, and no obvious conflicts of interest. It is still early in the construction process, and therefore by no means too late to appoint a monitor whose reports would not invite questions about its impartiality.

Nevertheless, the fact that PwC found a sharp increase in the percentage of workers paying crushing recruitment fees (up from 73% to 86%) and relocation fees (up from 79% to 92%) amounts to a stark verdict on the inability of TDIC to enforce its own employment practices rules on Saadiyat Island: these debts result in a worker's de facto indenture. We maintain that if TDIC and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi spent as much time, effort and creative energy on solving the issue of recruitment fees as they do on buying artworks, they would have solved this matter long ago.

We urge TDIC, the Guggenheim, Louvre, British Museum, New York University, and all others building on Saadiyat Island to take seriously our concerns and commit themselves to finding remedies. It would be a noteworthy accomplishment if the acquisition of beautiful and thought provoking artworks in New York, Paris, Beirut and Delhi to fill the new museums in the Gulf were matched by the development, implementation and enforcement of progressive and exemplary labor laws on Saadiyat Island.

On a more positive note, several concrete steps have been taken regarding the building of an infrastructure for art in the region: the Guggenheim's joint statement on worker's rights (<http://www.guggenheim.org/abu-dhabi/about/joint-statement-on-workers-rights>), Human Rights Watch's second, follow-up report (<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/03/21/island-happiness-revisited-0>), and the appointment of PwC as an outside, even though not an independent, monitor, now having delivered its second report. These developments have been greatly influenced by the continuing Gulf Labor boycott.

Nonetheless, we remain concerned about the workers' safety, their housing, their ability to express grievances, and their basic economic conditions. With our ongoing

efforts, we hope to see the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi emerge from our campaign as an example of "best practices" with regard to architecture and art in the region. As a coalition of artists and cultural activists our logic has been to take the UAE's interest in Western brands as an opportunity to raise questions about institutional responsibility and social justice by asking "who builds your architecture <http://whobuilds.org/>?"

Please see our 52 Weeks campaign ([www.gulflabor.org](http://www.gulflabor.org)) as complementing the work of groups such as Human Rights Watch by generating new modes of relating to and engaging with the inequitable labor conditions in the Gulf and beyond.

---

Gulf Labor is a coalition of artists and activists who have been working since 2011 to highlight the coercive recruitment, and deplorable living and working conditions of migrant laborers in Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Island (Island of Happiness). Our campaign focuses on the workers who are building the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, and the Sheikh Zayed National Museum (in collaboration with the British Museum).

"52 Weeks" is a one-year campaign that started in October 2013. Artists, writers, and activists from different cities and countries are invited to contribute a work, a text, or action each week that relates to or highlights the unjust living and working conditions of migrant laborers building cultural institutions in Abu Dhabi.

To learn more visit: [www.gulflabor.org](http://www.gulflabor.org)

Please read and/or sign our [petition](#)

For additional information, please email: [contact@gulflabor.org](mailto:contact@gulflabor.org)