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GUGGENHEIM BOYCOTT GROUP MAKES RECOMMENDATIONS AFTER VISITS TO LABOR CAMPS IN ABU DHABI

In March, the Gulf Labor Coalition was invited by TDIC, the master-developer of Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Island, to visit the accommodation facility used to house workers building the Abu Dhabi branches of the Louvre and the Guggenheim. Gulf Labor coordinates an international boycott by artists and writers of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi in protest at the conditions of the migrant workforce engaged on Saadiyat's lavish construction projects. Its report on the visit is [here: http://gulflabor.org/saadiyatreport2014/](http://gulflabor.org/saadiyatreport2014/)

The Gulf Labor group found that workers' wages on Saadiyat remained at very low levels, and the persistent issue of recruitment fees had not been resolved. The group was impressed by many aspects of the model workers' "village" on Saadiyat Island, which is supposed to accommodate all TDIC employees. However, it recommends that the social isolation and high-security nature of the facility is not a good model to be followed in the UAE in general. As Gulf Labor member Shaina Anand puts it, "workers should not be increasingly segregated from the UAE citizens, tourists, and corporate expatriates whose needs they service on a daily basis."

Other recommendations included in the report are a relocation fee program for paying off recruitment debts, the adoption of an Abu Dhabi living wage for all Saadiyat workers, the formation of workers councils to maintain communications with, and channel grievances to, the UAE authorities, and the reform of compliance monitoring methods.

The Gulf Labor members who went to Saadiyat also visited off-island labor camps to meet and interview the migrant workers involved in the construction of NYU's new branch campus and other Saadiyat projects. In common with other independent investigators, this team found multiple violations of the labor codes instituted by TDIC and by NYU. These violations include nonpayment of recruitment fees, employer retention of passports, mandatory overtime shifts, withheld pay, deportation without due process after work stoppages, substandard housing conditions, and non-delivery of promised pay increases.

The NYU branch campus is scheduled to open on Saadiyat this Fall. According to Andrew Ross, a Gulf Labor member who is also an NYU professor: "Though construction will soon be complete, the campus will still have to be maintained by a large workforce whose conditions should be upgraded and more carefully monitored than they have been until now. Their rights should be upheld just as strongly as the academic freedoms of faculty and students."

Construction on the Guggenheim museum is expected to pick up in the coming months. In anticipation of this next phase, Gulf Labor's Walid Raad suggested that "there is still time for the Guggenheim to take some decisive and momentous actions." He affirmed that the group "intends to fully cooperate with the museum, TDIC, and other interested parties in implementing the recommendations made in our report."

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