



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

“The Island of Happiness”

Exploitation of Migrant Workers on Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH



“The Island of Happiness”

**Exploitation of Migrant Workers on
Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi**

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Human Rights Watch
350 Fifth Avenue, 34th floor
New York, NY 10118-3299 USA
Tel: +1 212 290 4700, Fax: +1 212 736 1300
hrwnyc@hrw.org

Poststraße 4-5
10178 Berlin, Germany
Tel: +49 30 2593 06-10, Fax: +49 30 2593 0629
berlin@hrw.org

Avenue des Gaulois, 7
1040 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: + 32 (2) 732 2009, Fax: + 32 (2) 732 0471
hrwbe@hrw.org

64-66 Rue de Lausanne
1202 Geneva, Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 738 0481, Fax: +41 22 738 1791
hrwgva@hrw.org

2-12 Pentonville Road, 2nd Floor
London N1 9HF, UK
Tel: +44 20 7713 1995, Fax: +44 20 7713 1800
hrwuk@hrw.org

27 Rue de Lisbonne
75008 Paris, France
Tel: +33 (1) 43 59 55 35, Fax: +33 (1) 43 59 55 22
paris@hrw.org

1630 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 500
Washington, DC 20009 USA
Tel: +1 202 612 4321, Fax: +1 202 612 4333
hrwdc@hrw.org

Web Site Address: <http://www.hrw.org>



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Summary

Saadiyat Island, in the Arabian Gulf, lies 500 meters off the coast of Abu Dhabi, the oil-rich capital of the United Arab Emirates. Today, the triangular, 27 square kilometer island consists primarily of sand and mangrove swamp. Within a decade, if a \$22 to 27 billion development plan goes according to schedule, the island will host six cultural institutions, including outposts of the Guggenheim and Louvre museums; a museum dedicated to Abu Dhabi's heritage and the UAE's first president, Sheikh Zayed; a Maritime Museum; a performing arts center; and a campus of New York University. It will also include two golf courses, expensive private residences, a marina, and 29 hotels. The first of these institutions scheduled to begin construction is the Louvre, which will break ground in May 2009, with the Guggenheim and the Sheikh Zayed museum to follow.

The government of Abu Dhabi established the Tourism Development & Investment Company (TDIC) to develop Jazeera al-Saadiyat – “the Island of Happiness” – into an exclusive international tourist attraction. But many of the migrant workers currently building Saadiyat Island have little happiness in their lives or work: they continue to face the same types of exploitation and abuse Human Rights Watch documented in the UAE in our 2006 report, *Building Towers, Cheating Workers*.¹

The UAE government has addressed a number of issues affecting the lives of migrant workers, including attempts to improve housing conditions and access to health care. And TDIC also has sought to ensure that its contractors address some of these issues as well, by contractually requiring employers to affirm that they do not engage in or support the use of forced labor, require employees to surrender passports, or withhold wages from employees. Despite these affirmations, abuses continue, as the reforms have failed to address the fundamental sources of worker exploitation – employee-paid recruiting fees; visas controlled by employers; very low wages often far below what was promised workers in their home countries; and restrictions on organizing and no real access to legal remedies. As a result, the abuse of workers remains commonplace.

The Guggenheim Museum, the French Museum Agency (which is overseeing the development of the Abu Dhabi Louvre), New York University, and other institutions have failed to take adequate steps to avoid the same abuses on their own workplaces. These

¹ Human Rights Watch, *Building Towers, Cheating Workers: Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers in the United Arab Emirates*, November 2006, <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2006/11/11/building-towers-cheating-workers>.

institutions should obtain enforceable guarantees from their UAE development partners that the construction of their facilities in Abu Dhabi – whether bearing their name or actually run by them – will not involve abuse of migrant workers.

Labor conditions in Abu Dhabi

Drawn by the promise of jobs in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), thousands of men from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Thailand are working on Saadiyat Island. Workers spend up to 12 hours per day on their worksites, often in extreme conditions of heat and humidity with temperatures often exceeding 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius). Some workers have been on Saadiyat Island for more than two years, working on massive infrastructure projects, including raising the island's level by trucking in sand and building 10-lane highways and bridges.

Many workers say that “labor supply” agencies in their home countries promised them jobs with UAE construction companies offering good wages and low living expenses. In exchange for providing UAE work visas and in some cases plane tickets, the agencies charged the men fees of up to US \$4100 – nine times the average income of some workers' home countries. To pay the agencies' fees, workers borrowed money from relatives, raised cash by selling their farmland, livestock and homes, or took out loans from money lenders at often high interest rates. UAE law prohibits employers from working with agencies that charge workers recruiting fees; but neither the UAE government or TDIC (a government-owned development company) and their international partners have acted to ensure compliance with the law, and workers employed by the construction companies that are working on Saadiyat Island continue to bear this unlawful, unjust burden on their livelihood.

Because they are often already highly indebted upon arrival in the UAE, many workers have virtually no power to bargain over the terms of the official UAE work contracts their corporate employers require them to sign upon arrival in the UAE. Many workers – often illiterate – did not even understand the terms of these new contracts. Workers said that upon arrival in the UAE, representatives of construction companies told them to sign contracts in Arabic and English, languages most of them could not understand, without explaining the terms of the contracts. Workers were not given a copy of these contracts, as required by UAE law. Some workers say company representatives told them to put their fingerprints on blank pieces of paper, possibly in lieu of signing contracts.

After signing these contracts, many of the workers on Saadiyat Island discovered that their salaries in the UAE were as little as 50 per cent of what the agencies in their home countries

had promised, and that their overtime pay, vacation days and other benefits were also greatly reduced. UAE officials have stated that the UAE will not intervene in cases of contract fraud perpetrated by foreign labor agencies outside the country's borders. Embassy officials from labor sending countries in Abu Dhabi said their hands were tied unless workers had written contracts from the labor supply agencies; only two of the 94 Saadiyat Island workers Human Rights Watch spoke to did.

The semi-skilled and unskilled workers Human Rights Watch interviewed on the island received an average daily salary of around US \$8.00 per day, for 10 paid hours per day including overtime, although they often spent 12 hours at the jobsite and up to 2 additional hours traveling to and from the island. An estimate of the average yearly salary, including overtime wages, of foreign workers on Saadiyat Island is \$2575. By contrast, according to a Guggenheim Foundation press release from 2006, the average per capita annual income of Abu Dhabi is "approximately US \$30,000." Workers said several companies paid their overtime wages at the same rate as their normal work hours, in violation of UAE law. While some Saadiyat Island workers had recently received small pay raises (usually around \$5.45 per month), their pay has not kept pace with inflation; rice, for example, has more than doubled in price in the UAE over the past year. Despite requirements in a law dating from 1980, the UAE government has failed to implement a minimum wage or a cost-of-living index.

Due to the combination of large agency fees, loans with usurious interest rates, and low wages, many workers on Saadiyat said that instead of saving money, they will have to work for years simply to pay off their creditors. For example, one man told Human Rights Watch that after 18 months he had paid off the principal of his loan but still owed an even greater amount in interest.

UAE laws prevent workers on Saadiyat Island from improving their financial position. A foreign construction worker's ability to work and live in the UAE depends on the continuing "sponsorship" of a single company. By law, workers who seek a better job at another company – a practice referred to as "absconding" – are subject to deportation and banned from returning to the UAE for one year, except in cases where the original employer has failed to pay them for more than two months. An employer can trigger the deportation of a worker who has left to find a better job by requesting the UAE ministries of labor and interior to cancel his work permit and residency visa, rendering his presence in the UAE illegal.

Companies exercise the excessive control UAE law grants them over foreign workers by confiscating workers' passports. Workers on Saadiyat Island reported that this practice is

universal. Some workers, for example, reported that companies refused to return their passports to allow them to attend relatives' weddings or funerals in their home countries. UAE and international law prohibit passport-confiscation as violating the right to freedom of movement. Yet UAE laws also provide a perverse incentive to confiscate passports. Companies face heavy fines if they fail to request the UAE government to cancel "absconding" workers' visas, and the accepted cancellation procedure is for companies to turn in the workers' passports to the Ministry of Interior.

One group of workers on Saadiyat Island said their employer told them that they could not quit their jobs and receive their passports without paying a large fine (which the company would deduct from the workers' legally-mandated bonus, to be paid at the end of their contract).

The insular nature of Saadiyat Island also impacts workers' freedom of movement. The Ministry of Labor has designated Saadiyat Island a "remote area," which requires companies to provide workers there with access to regular transportation. However, many workers said they could only leave the island on Fridays, their only day off, in company-provided buses. As the complaints department of the Ministry of Labor and the Shari'a Court are closed on Fridays, this also means that workers have virtually no access to grievance mechanisms. In some cases, workers are effectively working in conditions of forced labor: they were fraudulently lured to work in the UAE, had to work in order to pay off debts incurred to obtain their job, cannot flee the country because their employers have confiscated their passports upon arrival in the UAE and threatened them with illegal penalties if they quit their jobs, and because they depend upon their employers for transportation and lacked adequate access to grievance mechanisms. Such conditions of forced labor are prohibited by ILO Convention No. 29, which the UAE ratified in 1982.

All workers interviewed said they were afraid to demand better treatment by filing complaints to the UAE Ministry of Labor or to the courts: they believed that they risked being fired and deported if they did so. Workers on Saadiyat also said they are afraid to unionize or strike and in some cases have been threatened by company representatives not to do so. Workers who attempt to organize, to bargain collectively or to strike to demand their rights are not protected by law and may also face termination and deportation. The UAE government has jailed tens of thousands of striking workers over the past three years, according to news reports, and has deported an unknown number.

Non-union advocacy for workers' rights is virtually non-existent. The UAE does not recognize any non-governmental human rights organizations, apart from the semi-official Emirates

Human Rights Association and other groups like the Red Crescent; independent human rights activists commonly face harassment and censorship. Human Rights Watch spoke to representatives of two unrecognized NGOs that try to help foreign workers, one of which was a local chapter of a Philippines-based NGO, but rather than taking the risk of lobbying the UAE government, they instead try to influence their home-country embassies. There is virtually no public discussion of the systemic nature of workers' rights violations. Local news media do report some violent strikes and worker deaths due to unsafe working conditions, but self-censorship appears to prevent robust media coverage of abuses of foreign workers' rights.

Labor reforms

The UAE and Abu Dhabi have taken some important preliminary steps to curb abuses against foreign construction workers, although there have also been broken promises of reforms and failures to enforce the law. The most concrete legislative reform visible in Abu Dhabi remains the 2005 ban on work during the hottest hours of the day in July and August, originally imposed from 12:30 to 4:30 pm, in order to prevent heat exhaustion. After industry lobbying, the government reduced the break to 12:30 to 3:00 p.m. Cases of heat exhaustion reporting to the main Abu Dhabi public hospital during those months have decreased (from 384 cases in 2005 to 140 in 2008). Most workers Human Rights Watch interviewed reported that their companies observed the mandatory break, although some workers said that companies had shifted their work hours to begin at 2 p.m. and end at 2 a.m. during July and August, meaning they began work during the break period. Workers remain on the worksite during the break hours.

On November 7, 2006, the UAE prime minister issued a decree ordering the labour minister to implement immediate reforms in a number of areas, including:

1. Adequate housing – with “adequate” defined as consistent with international standards and conventions [...];
2. Safe transportation of workers to labour sites—for example, a complete ban on open-air conveyances in extreme weather conditions;
3. A recruitment process for at least 2,000 new [labor] inspectors over time to keep pace with the fast growth of the labour sector amid rapidly increasing construction and development;
4. New federal labour courts to fast-track labour dispute resolutions [...];
5. Workers scheduled for return to their native countries are adequately housed and fed pending their departure; [and]

6. Workers who have been cheated on wages or simply not paid for more than two months are granted immediate release from their employer sponsorships if they so choose.

In March 2007, the UAE Ministry of Labor restated many of these directives in an announcement of planned reforms.

Governmental and private authorities have taken some, limited positive steps following the 2006 decree that housing for workers be brought in line with “international standards and conventions.” The UAE minister of labor stated on March 25, 2007 that the government had closed 100 Dubai worker accommodations (compounds rented or owned by companies that house hundreds or thousands of workers in shared rooms, commonly referred to as labor camps). TDIC executives told Human Rights Watch that Saadiyat Island’s housing facilities will meet or exceed international standards. The company’s “CSR [corporate social responsibility] Report 2009” describes accommodations standards that exceed UAE requirements in terms of the numbers of workers housed per room, facilities available on the labor camp site, and in other areas.

Ensuring minimum housing standards for workers on Saadiyat Island will be a welcome and necessary step. However, it is clear that the 2006 decree to improve workers’ accommodations remains largely aspirational, at best. In August 2008, for example, public health authorities in Dubai stated that 40 percent of that emirate’s 1,033 labor camps violated minimum health and fire safety standards. In June 2008, a chickenpox outbreak in a Sharjah labor camp was linked to unhygienic conditions. In August, 11 construction workers in Dubai died when the 30-room residence where 500 workers were illegally housed caught fire; some had to jump out of windows due to blocked exits. Human Rights Watch observed crowded rooms in several labor camps in Dubai and Abu Dhabi (albeit not those of Saadiyat Island) where new arrivals were required to sleep on the floor rather than on mattresses for days or weeks. Moreover, according to news reports, the economic recession has led to an escalation in overcrowding and other poor treatment of workers at labor camps. In March 2009, the Ministry of Labor’s chief inspector said that some companies, to cut costs, have added as much as 40 percent to the population of their labor camps (without increasing space for accommodation), and have cut workers’ meals from three a day to one.

The 2006 decree also required employers to provide health insurance for low-skilled workers. As of September 2008, Abu Dhabi mandated such health insurance; Dubai announced plans to phase in mandatory health insurance by 2015. However, as discussed below (“Inadequate Healthcare”), the provision of health care in Abu Dhabi remains inadequate, with some

workers reporting that they were required to pay the costs of medication and hospital visits from their salaries, while others complain that except in the case of traumatic injuries, it was difficult to gain access to medical professionals besides the “company nurses” provided at the work-site for treatment.

Improved safety and inspection standards remain problematic, as the government has not met its own goals to improve regulation. The 2006 decree ordered the Ministry of Labor to hire 2,000 more labor inspectors. In March 2007, the Ministry of Labor stated that the inspectors would be hired within “a few months ... an indication of the seriousness with which the Government is tackling this task.” However, according to a US State Department report on human rights practices, as of December 31, 2008, the total number of Ministry of Labor health and safety inspectors in the UAE stood at only 48. None of the workers interviewed for this report had seen a labor inspector at a work site or a labor camp. Forty eight labor inspectors cannot possibly be expected to provide meaningful regulation of the thousands of construction sites ongoing in the country.

In February 2007, the government put forward a draft labor law that, although it perpetuated many of the flaws of the current law by failing to guarantee workers’ right to form unions, strike and bargain collectively, did require employers to pay the expenses of migrant workers’ travel, employment permits, medical examinations, and other required administrative costs as well as the cost of workers’ health care, including coverage of migrant workers upon arrival in the country. However, the government withdrew the draft law and has not commented on possible labor law reform since.

Thus, none of the proposed reforms has addressed concretely the fundamental sources of abuse: recruiting fees paid by workers, confiscation of workers’ passports, restrictions on workers’ movements and employment, coupled with laws and practices that penalize workers who demand better treatment by collectively bargaining, forming unions, or striking.

There is no indication that promises for reform have resulted in any change in the payment of recruiting fees by workers, which remains endemic and lies at the heart of their exploitation. The UAE signed an MOU on Labor and Manpower Sourcing with India in December 2006, which required that the recruitment of “all categories of workers” must “be in conformity with the laws of both countries,” and that the “terms and conditions of employment” offered by agencies to workers in India must conform to the work permit that the employer obtained from the UAE government; the employer would have no authority to change the contract conditions. On March 25, 2007, the Ministry of Labor stated that it had signed MOUs with labor-sending countries to improve regulation and monitoring of labor

recruitment agencies in those countries; that it was considering creating government-run agencies in the UAE; and that it would freeze issuing new licenses for UAE-based recruitment agencies pending a review of the UAE regulatory framework. If implemented, such MOUs would be a first step toward preventing non-UAE-based labor supply agencies from charging workers illegal recruitment fees as well as from, in some cases, promising workers conditions of employment that far exceed their actual terms upon arrival in the UAE (referred to as “contract substitution”). However, although the Ministry of Labor has announced imposing fines on UAE-based recruitment agencies, Human Rights Watch is not aware of any cases where employers have been required to compensate workers for illegal fees they paid to labor supply agencies, and none of the scores of workers we interviewed had been repaid these costs (or knew of any cases of repayment).

Despite promises of reform regarding the prompt payment of wages, the practice in Abu Dhabi remains problematic. UAE legislative reforms require employers to open bank accounts for all foreign workers and to pay their salaries regularly into those accounts, rather than paying workers in cash on the worksite. The reform was intended to combat employers’ late payment of wages, which can cause heavily indebted migrant construction workers to miss interest payments and incur further fees. Electronic payment records would also facilitate audits of companies for violations, such as illegal withholding of wages, which Human Rights Watch documented as a widespread and “customary” violation in our 2006 report.

One group of workers on Saadiyat Island, however, had still not been paid more than two and a half months after beginning work. Other workers said their companies had not set up bank accounts for them and continued to pay their wages in cash on dates that varied by a week or more each month. A senior advisor to the Ministry of Labor told Human Rights Watch in November 2008 that the program was not being implemented as quickly as desired because several banks were reluctant to participate in the scheme, as it would require them to set up large numbers of bank accounts where relatively small amounts of money were transferred. According to the chief Ministry of Labor inspector, “late payment and reduction in wages are the most two consistent violations” of workers’ rights today, as they were in 2006.

Another area in which the government has made no progress is in allowing workers to form trade unions and to strike. In October 2004, the legislative committee of the Ministry of Justice approved a bill allowing the formation of trade unions in the private sector; despite several announcements that the government would pass the bill, it has not. Instead, workers who go on strike continue to face detention and deportation. Although news reports suggest

that recently, the authorities have mostly deported violent protestors, several construction workers and other migrant workers, including taxi drivers, told Human Rights Watch of friends or acquaintances whom police had summarily detained, driven to the airport, and deported after they had gone on strike. The deportee would later call his friends back in the UAE to tell them the story. Workers told Human Rights Watch that there was no administrative or judicial hearing of any kind during these deportations.

The main complaint of migrant construction workers in Abu Dhabi in 2008, as it was for workers in Dubai and Sharjah in 2006, was that they are paid low wages, in many cases after being promised better salaries by labor supply agencies against whom they had no recourse. Establishing a minimum wage in the UAE would help prevent such deceptive practices. In 1980, Federal Law No. 8 on Labor Relations required the government to implement a minimum wage and cost-of-living index. Nearly three decades later, the government still has not done so. In June 2008 the Ministry of Labor said the government was unlikely to adopt a minimum wage in the near future.

The role of international institutions

Since 2005, several international educational and cultural institutions signed agreements to build branches in the “cultural district” of Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi, including the Guggenheim, the Louvre, and New York University. Internationally renowned architectural firms are designing each of the six institutions of the cultural district, including Gehry Partners, LLP (the Guggenheim); Ateliers Jean Nouvel (the Louvre); Foster and Partners (the Sheikh Zayed Museum); Tadao Ando Architects and Associates (the Maritime Museum); Zaha Hadid Architects (the performing arts center); and Rafael Vinoly Architects PC (New York University). The Guggenheim Foundation was the first to be affiliated with the project; the Louvre and New York University followed. Human Rights Watch contacted each of these institutions and architects with our concerns, urging them to take proactive steps – at a minimum, obtaining contractual guarantees from their UAE development partner that it will prohibit contractors involved in their projects from practicing the most serious and pervasive abuses, such as confiscating workers’ passports and failing to pay recruiting fees, to ensure that their institutions are not beneficiaries of the exploitation of migrant workers in Abu Dhabi.

Human Rights Watch identified several companies operating on Saadiyat Island, including the UAE construction Al Jaber, Arabtec, Saif Bin Darwish, and Abu Dhabi National Hotels / Compass (ADNH), as well as the German company Ed. Zueblin AG and the Australian

company Leighton International, which has partnered with the UAE company Al Habtoor to form Al Habtoor Leighton Group.

Some institutions were more forthcoming and cooperative than others in Human Rights Watch's efforts. Of the institutions that discussed workers' rights with us, the Guggenheim and the French Museum Agency (which the French government created to oversee the creation of the Abu Dhabi Louvre) said that they felt hampered by pressure from TDIC to remain silent on the issue, particularly in an economic climate where revenues from the Abu Dhabi project were more needed than ever; NYU has not dealt directly with TDIC but with the Abu Dhabi Executive Affairs Authority, although NYU officials are aware that TDIC is responsible for overseeing construction of Saadiyat Island's infrastructure which will serve the NYU campus.

These three institutions recognized and appreciated the pervasiveness of the problems in Abu Dhabi, but to date appear to be proceeding with their projects notwithstanding the exploitation of workers the projects are likely to entail. Only one, the Agence France-Muséums (which is overseeing the Louvre Abu Dhabi), with whose staff Human Rights Watch met and discussed these issues on a number of occasions, has described how it had obtained any specific contractual promises from TDIC, the development partner in these projects, regarding standards for and independent monitoring of the treatment of migrant workers.

Human Rights Watch met with members of the Guggenheim Foundation in April 2008 and with consultants to the Abu Dhabi Guggenheim project in February 2009. We were told that the Guggenheim had specifically raised Human Rights Watch's reporting on abuses against migrant construction workers to TDIC during initial negotiations in 2006. However, current contractual language contains no concrete human rights monitoring requirements or any specific provisions regarding labor.

Human Rights Watch first contacted New York University with our concerns in September 2007; NYU did not respond until 2009, when officials finally met Human Rights Watch on April 10. University officials at the meeting stated that they had not sought any specific contractual guarantees of workers' rights protections from the Abu Dhabi Executive Affairs Authority (EAA), their development partner, because construction of the campus had not yet begun; there was a "commitment on both our parts to make sure NYU is a model of best practices in Abu Dhabi"; and "we believe them [the EAA] that labor issues are a top priority for them and that they have room to improve." NYU has published, with the EAA, a list of eleven "labor values," which state that the NYU project will comply with UAE laws but which

are often vague and do not address the fundamental concerns this report documents. For example, the first “value” states that, “As a floor, workers providing services to NYU Abu Dhabi will be paid wages and benefits which comply with all applicable UAE laws and regulations and which provide for their essential needs and living standards.” There is no minimum wage in the UAE.

The British Museum, which according to media reports will establish an unspecified presence in Abu Dhabi, had not responded to a letter Human Rights Watch sent on March 9, 2009 as of April 20.

We conveyed our concerns to the architectural firms that designed the museums, educational and other cultural institutions slated for construction on Saadiyat Island. We supplied Gehry Partners LLC, the architect of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, with proposed contractual provisions that we believed would help protect the rights of migrant workers’ on the Guggenheim project under international law while not conflicting with domestic UAE legislation.

Human Rights Watch encourages the global vision of these non-profit cultural and educational institutions, but calls on them to ensure their expansion does not come at the cost of abusing migrant workers who may never be able to afford admission to the museums or tuition at the university. These institutions and the other companies engaged in building their new Abu Dhabi branches, could also take steps to show their commitment to human rights. The UN Global Compact, for example, allows companies to pledge their adherence to ten “principles” in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. Compliance with the principles would, at minimum, require companies to take measures to avoid perpetuating and benefiting from conditions of indentured servitude and other serious rights violations on their own worksites.

Human Rights Watch also has attempted to address these issues of abuse directly with the development company with the greatest responsibility and capacity to influence what happens on all of these work sites: TDIC. We met with officials of TDIC in Abu Dhabi in November 2008, and received a response to a letter we sent requesting further information in January 2009. Our letter to TDIC detailed our specific findings about the ways that construction and other companies currently operating to develop the island, with which TDIC had contracted, were apparently violating workers’ rights, including by confiscating their passports, failing to repay the illegal fees charged by labor supply agencies, failing to pay them in a timely fashion, failing to provide adequate health care and health insurance, and

threatening to fire them – which would, under UAE laws, trigger their deportation – if they unionized.

TDIC's response included a lengthy list of the contractual provisions it has required of contractors on Saadiyat Island, and the information that it had recently required all contractors to affirm their adherence to these provisions, and had hired an auditor to monitor compliance. These are welcome steps, as is the fact that TDIC subsequently sent a letter to its contractors requiring them to confirm that: "1. you do not engage in or support the use of forced labour; 2. your employees are not required to surrender passports to you on commencing employment; 3. you do not withhold wages from employees."

However, TDIC's response did not address, directly or indirectly, many of our other questions, including with regard to the payment of recruiting fees by workers to labor supply or recruitment agencies; most of the contractual provisions cited were vague, boilerplate obligations requiring contractors to abide by "applicable laws," none specifically addressed the fundamental issues that underlie migrant workers' exploitation. Human Rights Watch's research indicates that TDIC's contractors are in breach of contractual provisions related to workers' rights – as do, in two cases, the statements of the contractors themselves. Ed. Zueblin AG responded to our question regarding the confiscation of passports with the information that "passports are obviously important official documents and we feel it is our duty to ensure that these are protected for our workers. We therefore keep them safe centrally for various reasons [...]. There are no restrictions for workers to have their passports returned at any time." Al Habtoor Leighton responded that "the passports are stored in safe fire-proof security boxes in head office and are available to all staff upon request." Human Rights Watch cannot confirm whether TDIC has implemented a monitoring program focused on workers' rights, or the results of any such program.

We appreciate TDIC's openness to discussing these matters of concern, although we regret that, according to two of the construction companies we contacted, Leighton and Ed. Zueblin AG, TDIC informed them that they should not meet or correspond with Human Rights Watch about their roles in the development of Saadiyat Island.

In this report, Human Rights Watch documents severe exploitation of workers on Saadiyat Island. In some cases, this exploitation amounts to forced labor. Violations against foreign workers are likely to continue in a context where workers are generally not aware of their rights and are afraid of expressing grievances, independent and effective monitoring is lacking, and unions and workers' rights NGOs do not exist. Unless the Guggenheim, the Louvre, NYU, and other institutions urgently insist and ensure that their local development

partner protects workers' rights under UAE and international law, these institutions' newest branches may be built by abused workers.