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Qatar: Human rights defender Malcolm Bidali charged

On 29 May 2021, the Qatari Government Communication Office (GCO) declared that human rights defender **Malcolm Bidali** has been charged with “offences related to payments received by a foreign agent for the creation and distribution of disinformation within the State of Qatar”. The human rights defender has been in detention since 4 May 2021.

[Malcolm Bidali](#) is a labour rights defender and blogger from Kenya. He has worked as a security guard in Qatar and his human rights activities focus on documenting and exposing online the exploitation and human rights violations migrant workers are subjected to in Qatar. Malcolm Bidali has also written for the organisation Migrant-Rights.org, where he has voiced concerns about the the work and living conditions in Qatar for migrant workers.

On the 4 May 2021, Malcolm Bidali was dropped by his company at the Qatari Criminal Investigation Department in Doha, following a request made by the Qatari authorities to his company to send him to the Department. On 20 May 2021 Malcolm Bidali’s mother spoke to him on the phone for the first time since his detention, which was only permitted following an intervention by the Kenyan Embassy in Qatar. The phone call lasted for 10 minutes, during which two security guards accompanied the human rights defender. Malcolm Bidali told his mother that he was in solitary confinement and that he had received threats but he did not specify what the threats were about. On 29 May 2021, the Qatari Government Communication Office (GCO), released a statement declaring that human rights defender Malcolm Bidali had been charged with “offences related to payments received by a foreign agent for the creation and distribution of disinformation within the State of Qatar”. The statement also declared that Malcolm Bidali’s case has been transferred to the Public Prosecutor, after “a thorough investigation”, and that the human rights defender is “receiving legal advice and representation ahead of the court date”, although the date for the court hearing session was not made public.

Human rights defenders working in Qatar face many obstacles and difficulties in the form of government harassment, restrictions on freedom of expression, travel restrictions and arbitrary detention. The detention of Malcolm Bidali took place a few days after he spoke at an online event about labour rights in Qatar, and the issues that migrant workers face. The human rights defender is a rare voice in Qatar shining a spotlight on human rights abuses against migrant workers in the country.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned regarding the arbitrary detention of human rights defender Malcolm Bidali and believes that his arrest is a result of his peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

Front Line Defenders calls the Qatari authorities to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally drop the charges against Malcolm Bidali and release him, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Malcolm Bidali, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the *‘Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment’*, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988

3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Qatar are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions [including judicial harassment].