

For immediate release

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This morning, eleven New York University student, faculty and worker organizations delivered a letter to the NYU administration condemning recent labor violations at the NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) campus. The letter demands reforms to secure the rights of workers at NYUAD, and compensation for workers who have been deported because they organized to defend their rights.

The letter calls upon NYU President John Sexton, NYU Board of Trustees Chairman Martin Lipton, NYU Abu Dhabi Vice Chancellor Al Bloom to institute changes protecting current and future NYU workers from similar abuses. The letter demands a public response from the University by March 1st, 2015 and promises further escalation if this deadline is not met.

The letter reads, “As ‘a private university in the public service’ and a global network university, NYU must respect and uphold workers’ universal human rights in New York, Abu Dhabi, Shanghai, and in its multiple global sites.”

This letter responds to continued reports of workers’ human rights violations, most recently a February 10th Human Rights Watch report detailing past abuses. These included brutal punishments for striking and demanding better working conditions, including expulsion from Abu Dhabi; misleading and inadequate responses from NYU to reports of workers’ rights violations; endemic low pay, long hours, delayed payments, and withheld wages.

The letter demands just compensation for abused NYUAD construction workers; the securing of current and future NYUAD workers’ freedom of association, right to organize, strike, and collectively bargain; disclosure of a confidential code of conduct operationalizing labor standards at NYUAD; implementation and enforcement of the Statement of Labor Values through appointment of a truly independent labor monitor.

The letter accuses NYU of violating its own principles, reading: “NYU President John Sexton has characterized the University as a sanctuary. But sanctuaries do not allow the workers who build their structures to be intimidated and beaten, to have their passports withheld, or to be expelled from the country where they work.”

Kristina Bogos, NYU senior and student leader of the Coalition for Fair Labor at NYU, said, “Although construction of the NYUAD campus is complete, NYU cannot relinquish responsibility for its past actions and remain silent about worker abuse that will persist on Saadiyat Island. Rather, it should assume responsibility and be proactive about human and workers’ rights in Abu Dhabi, and at all global sites.”

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Astha Sharma Pokharel, a student at the NYU School of Law, said, “NYU’s inadequate response to the abuses faced by workers at the NYUAD construction site brings into question its commitment to human rights. As students at NYU, we are demanding transparency and

accountability in what the university does at all of its campuses. We will keep pushing the NYU administration to secure the rights of its workers, and to redress past abuses.”

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Andrew Ross, NYU Professor and president of the NYU chapter of American Association of University Professors, said, “NYUAD is the top research center in the UAE, and so we have an opportunity, as well as a responsibility, to use our faculty and student resources to come up with reforms to the kafala sponsorship system which so cruelly entraps migrant workers. Now that the problem of labor abuse has been fully exposed, NYU should be part of the solution.”

“As graduate workers at NYU’s New York facilities, we are revolted by the NYU administration’s gross violation of workers’ rights at our university’s Abu Dhabi campus. The administration must act now to respect workers’ rights at each of its campuses and global sites,” said Natasha Raheja of the graduate workers’ union, GSOC-UAW.

“The NYU administration has repeatedly demonstrated its disdain for students and workers by excluding them from the University’s decision-making processes. By demanding that the University redress the wrongs done to workers in Abu Dhabi, students and workers are beginning to question NYU’s corporate model of higher education,” says Jonah Walters of the NYU Student & Labor Action Movement. “But student organizations have won concessions from NYU in the past. We can do it again. NYU should expect pressure to continue as outraged students organize to further exercise our right to free speech.”

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