

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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WATCH

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HE Sheikh Abdullah Bin Nasser Bin Khalifa Al-Thani
Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior
Doha, Qatar

c.c. Brigadier Abdullah Saqr Al Mohannadi,
Director of Human Rights Department
Ministry of Interior

Your Excellency,

We are writing to you to express concern regarding the situation of members of the Al-Ghufran clan whose Qatari citizenship authorities revoked between 1996 and 2005 and to share with you the preliminary findings of research carried out by Human Rights Watch into the human rights implications of these revocations which appear to have been carried out arbitrarily. We would appreciate your responses to the questions at the end of this letter.

As an international, independent, non-governmental organization concerned with human rights issues in over 90 countries around the world, we regularly reach out to governmental authorities to discuss human rights issues of mutual concern. We thank the government of the State of Qatar for its continued cooperation with Human Rights Watch.

We have examined three cases of families residing in Qatar and totaling 27 individuals and one individual residing in Saudi Arabia who say they have been rendered stateless as a result of the arbitrary revocation of their nationalities between 1996 and 2005. Human Rights Watch also spoke to four individuals, two of whom

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reside in Qatar, who say they acquired Saudi citizenship between eight and 10 years after Qatar stripped them of their citizenship.

Researchers carried out interviews with 14 individuals residing in Qatar and elsewhere between January and April 2019. We also reviewed local and international laws pertaining to nationality as well as local and international media articles and statements from Qatari officials on the issue since 1996 and copies of individuals' government-issued documents including passports, birth certificates, and health cards.

Starting in 1996, the Qatari government reportedly revoked the citizenship of entire families belonging to this clan, with around 5,000 to 6,000 individuals stripped of citizenship between 2004 and 2005, as reported in media outlets, US State Department human rights reports, and as confirmed in 2006 by Khalid al-Attiyah, then-head of the National Committee for Human Rights. One estimate put the upper figure of those affected at 10,000. Deprived of their citizenship in Qatar, they could no longer, over time, hold employment, property, bank accounts; benefit from social services or state education; and some were detained. Others fled or were deported to Saudi Arabia, and some were able to obtain Saudi citizenship thereafter.

In early 2006, the government reportedly changed its policy and over subsequent months, restored nationality to some of those whose nationality it had stripped. The head of Qatar's National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) claimed on August 5, 2008 that around 5,700 individuals, which he said were 95% of those whose citizenships were revoked, had their citizenship restored. Some members of the al-Ghufran clan however, did not have their nationality restored and were unable to obtain a second nationality. In its annual reports between 2008 and 2014, the NHRC reported receiving 233 complaints regarding withdrawal and restoration of citizenship. It also reported receiving similar complaints between 2015 and 2017 but did not specify how many.

Our research finds that members of the al-Ghufran clan who have been stripped of citizenship are deprived of their right to marry and found a family, nationality, decent work, property, health, education, and freedom of movement. Because they are denied identity documents, those stripped of citizenship are also at greater risk

of arbitrary detention. They are denied a range of government benefits afforded to Qatari citizens, including free or subsidized housing, state jobs, food and energy subsidies, and free university education. In addition to those living stateless in Qatar, some families from the al-Gufran clan who have managed to acquire other nationalities but are living in Qatar are denied both the benefits of their Qatari and foreign nationality. In addition, despite a [new residency](#) law that allows children and spouses of [Qatari](#) women married to non-Qataris to acquire permanent residence status, in two cases Human Rights Watch documented where a father was stripped of his citizenship, but the mother retained hers, the children were not allowed to benefit from the law.

While we recognize and appreciate Qatari authorities' efforts to restore citizenship to some of those stripped of it, our research indicates that the restoration of citizenship has been taking place in a similarly arbitrary manner as the initial revocation of citizenship. In its 2010 annual report, the NHRC also reported that even those who have regained their citizenship have had difficulties accessing housing and employment benefits afforded to Qatari citizens. It is unclear how many people are still suffering as a result.

For a report that Human Rights Watch plans to publish in May 2019, we would be grateful for any response to the following requests that you could provide us by May 6, 2019:

- How many people from the al-Ghufran clan have had their citizenship revoked by the Qatari government since 1996?
- It has been reported that starting in 2006 some members of the al-Ghufran clan have had their citizenship restored. On what basis have those decisions been made? How many people have had their nationalities restored?
- What is the legal basis for the revocation of citizenship of members of the al-Ghufran clan? How were those revocations carried out?
- Who within the government makes the decision on citizenship revocation and restoration? Do those affected have a right of appeal? If so, what is the process by which an individual can appeal?
- How many complaints has the Ministry of Interior received from people from the al-Ghufran clan claiming their citizenship has been revoked? Please also

share the number of active requests to reinstate citizenship currently open at the Ministry of Interior.

- What is the process for members of the al-Ghufran clan trying to regain their citizenship? How long does it take? What evidence needs to be shown?
- How do Qatari authorities confirm that an individual holds a second nationality? Have any of those accused of dual nationality been given the chance to prove otherwise?
- Under Qatari law, if a Qatari acquires a second citizenship, does that result in his Qatari citizenship automatically being revoked? Are Qatar's naturalized athletes required to renounce their original citizenship in order to represent Qatar in international competitions?
- In cases in which an individual has obtained a second nationality after having his Qatari citizenship revoked, is there a process by which he can rescind his second nationality and restore his Qatari citizenship?
- It has come to our attention that in some cases some individuals have had their citizenship restored while other members of their immediate family have not been able to. Can you explain why this anomaly might take place?
- Are those who have had their citizenship restored considered to be nationalized Qataris?
- Did the Qatari authorities revoke the citizenship of the Sheikh of al-Murrah clan, 54 others from the clan, and the poet Mohammad Bin Futais al-Marri in 2017? Why? On what legal basis?

We thank you for your time and consideration of this matter. Should you require any additional information relating to this matter and to respond to our questions listed above, please reach out to my colleague at XX or by phone at XX.

Sincerely,



Lama Fakhri
Deputy Middle East Director
Human Rights Watch