**TED talk Iris van der Heide**

2022. 421. 4000. 1,2 million. 6. These numbers represent not just a story but a reality I want to shed light on with you tonight.

2022 is the year of the World Cup in Qatar. 421 builders have already died. 4000 are predicted to die. 1,2 million passports of migrant workers are taken away. 6 dollars is the wage workers earn for a day on the building site, if they get paid at all.

It is slavery what we find in Qatar nowadays. Hordes of people are working on infrastructure, stadiums and what more to prepare for one of the world’s biggest events: the World Cup in which 32 soccer teams participate. Five years ago, FIFA appointed Qatar as the country organizing this tournament, the first Arab state ever. But never before has such a choice of FIFA been more controversial.

Would you build a stadium without safety guidelines for 6 dollars a day? Would you work more than ten hours in 45 ˚C for 6 dollars a day? Would you sacrifice your human rights for 6 dollars a day? Well, 1,2 million migrant workers did.

Nevertheless, according to Global Finance, Qatar has the highest GDP in the world and could afford a much higher wage. If only Qatar’s huge income inequality was brought back, lives of thousands of people could be made more bearable.

This is not a case of money or financial struggles, but one of human dignity. There is no reason why workers should live in these terrible conditions. Why they should endanger their health and even risk their lives … to provide four weeks of entertainment for you and I, for the rest of the world.

The small country of Qatar is a third the size of the Netherlands. It only has some 2 million inhabitants, of which 16% is a Qatari national. The other 84% consists of migrant workers from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. They suffer under the kafala system, which forces migrant workers to hand in their passport … and identity. As stated in the 2014 World Report of Human Rights Watch, this makes them tremendously vulnerable to exploitation and unable to leave the country or switch jobs without permission of their employer. Their right of free choice is taken away with their passport.

The ones preparing for our exciting football event cannot leave the country and are likely to be hurt or to die. If we don’t do anything, 4000 people will find the death at the building site until all 32 football teams have arrived. And yes, of course, the world did try to do something in its typical manner of weeping and wailing but not undertaking real action. World leaders visited Qatar. FIFA investigated the case after Qatar’s bid was already accepted. Media attention created awareness, but all of this is not enough. So-called solutions did not work. Nothing real has improved and a drastic step is needed. European football teams should boycott the World Cup of 2022.

As I stated before, this is all about human rights. We can’t just ignore the facts, since they are clear. Europe has a moral duty to condemn practices like this. It could have been such a good chance for FIFA and the first Arab state ever hosting a World Cup to prove our biases wrong. The concept of building a bridge between Arab and the West is something we all can encourage. Unfortunately, the working out is more than horrible. There have been more than enough opportunities for the human rights breaching parties to change their approach. Now it’s 421 dead workers too late.

Our boycott is not based on European rule or dominance, but on respect for human rights. Doesn’t Europe stand for human rights? What message are we willing to send the rest of the world?

It is important that we do not let the world know of our condemnation too late. In seven years, protests will be drowned out by cheer during the finals. Now is the time to raise our voices.

On top of that, it is important that Europe acts as a unity in this case. Boycotting a World Cup will affect every European’s life. It is a massive opportunity to let everybody remark and create awareness about slavery.

I am aware of the fact that none of you are representing their country in the national football team. But I am also aware of the impact, we, as Honours students, as part of our nation and as citizens of Europe, can have. Throughout history, students movements have successfully called for reforms, like in Eastern-Europe at the beginning of the century. We can change other’s opinions and make use of the influence appointed to us in our societies.

Let us create awareness through conversations and social media. Let us go beyond weeping and wailing, but undertake real action. Let us use tools of justice as Amnesty International to expand the range of our influence by donating money or joining them in a student group.

We can use our time, money and efforts wisely. A few years ago, I have chosen to send money to a sponsor child every month. Being a student, I am not just poor or too busy. Being young and studying is not our weakness but our strength. We have opportunities, we have freedom and we have a whole life in front of us to realize our ideals.

We can and we must let the world know this is not the future we want to be.

If this drastic step is not taken, we will have one month of fun on the cost of thousands of workers who have suffered for years. Imagine Blind or Müller making that one deciding goal … from exactly that spot where Mahmoud or Khalaifi were at their last gasp.

FIFA’s motto says: football is more than a game. I agree on this and I hope you all do. It is about playing fair instead of sweating, instead of exploiting workers.

As long as sweated labour is the daily case on the World Cup building sites, the eager leaders of Qatar, the powerful bosses of FIFA and the benighted world do not deserve our national football heroes to sweat either.