

# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد      بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد  
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم      از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

European Languages

زبان های اروپائی

M. Mandl

## Riots in Saudi Arabia: ‘The Kingdom expels the same people it exploited’

<http://observers.france24.com/content/20131115-riots-saudi-arabia-kingdom-expels>

11/15/2013



Screen grab of a video showing riots in the neighbourhood of Manfouha in Riyadh, the capital.

Tensions have been simmering in Saudi Arabia over the past week. Hundreds of thousands of undocumented migrant workers have risen up against the ruling authorities, giving rise to scenes of rioting that the country has rarely seen.

The workers have been rioting over the recent wave of migrant expulsions from Saudi Arabia, which they claim is completely unjust, given the widespread exploitation many migrants have suffered at the hands of their Saudi patrons.

Violent clashes between security forces and migrant workers took place last Saturday in Riyadh, Jeddah, and Mecca. Three undocumented migrant workers died in the violence. Since November 4, the Saudi Arabian Interior Ministry has led a campaign to expel the country's illegal migrant workforce. That decision triggered widespread rioting among the workers, of whom 20,000 have already been sent home.

It's not the first time illegal migrant workers have been kicked out. 200,000 were expelled at the beginning of 2013, before the king offered a seven-month amnesty to allow undocumented migrants to get their legal status in order. The campaign's supposed objective is to fight against the country's unemployment rate, currently hovering at around 12%.

Foreign workers in Saudi Arabia are considered clandestine when they lack either a residency permit allowing them to work or a 'sponsor' [like other countries in the region, Saudi Arabia uses the 'kafala' system, according to which each worker must be taken charge of by a 'kafil', or a sponsor].

We don't know which side resorted to violence first [amateur images show outbursts of violence on both sides]. But it would be impossible to think that around three million people [Editor's note: the Interior Ministry estimates that's how many undocumented migrant workers reside in the country] could be expelled peacefully without a hitch, especially when the police go into neighborhoods populated exclusively by migrant workers to apply the law.

The problem at the root of it all is the carelessness of the authorities, who have allowed foreign labor trafficking to flourish in the country. Certainly, there are clandestine workers who used pilgrimage visas to get in, and who managed to get by afterwards by working here. But there are also the victims of the kafala system. From the 1980s onwards, Saudi Arabian businessmen got workers from Africa and Asia to come to the country by promising them work. Once they arrived, they weren't given any work. Instead, they let them work on the black market in exchange for a monthly sum of money. Other patrons charged expensive fees for work permits which turned out later to be invalid.

Now, to legalize the situation of these illegal workers and become their official sponsors, these patrons have to pay the equivalent of 20,000 Euros per worker, something that businessmen obviously never had the intention to do. These workers have therefore never had the opportunity to sort their legal status out, even during the truce offered by the king. And their children, although born here, also live illegally.

We're already starting to see the impact that these expulsions are having on daily life : garages, service stations and even electrical servicing shops no longer have workers, because they were all clandestine workers. Those migrant workers in a regular situation have revised their tariffs up. In the past, Saudi Arabians would never accept to do this kind of menial work. With unemployment, they're going to resign themselves to it. But it goes without saying that the salaries for those jobs will be higher [than they were when they were done by migrant workers].