



**United Nations  
Committee on Migrant Workers  
Review of the Initial Report of Burkina Faso  
19th Session  
September 9-13, 2013  
Geneva**

**Statement of the Advocates for Human Rights**

**BURKINA FASO – CRITIQUE OF GOVERNMENT WEBSITE ON HUMAN RIGHTS OF  
MIGRANT WORKERS**

2 September 2013

To the Honorable Expert Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present these remarks. The Advocates for Human Rights has submitted a written statement of August 26 in which we encouraged the Committee to take a deeper look at treaty reporting websites maintained by each state party in the examination of initial and periodic reports. In this statement we would like to take a more specific look at the official website of Burkina Faso.

**Websites reviewed:**

- The principle website we reviewed was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs site and its link to the site of the High Council for Burkina Faso Nationals Living Abroad (CSBE), which contains a very useful Guidebook for Burkinabes living and working in other countries: [www.mae.gov.bf/be.html](http://www.mae.gov.bf/be.html)
- In addition we reviewed the website of the Ministry of Human Rights and Promotion of Civil Participation at: [www.mpdh.gov.bf](http://www.mpdh.gov.bf) which has a duplicate link at <http://mdhpc.gov.bf>. However, we could not find any relevant information about migrant workers or about human rights treaty body reporting at this site.
- We also looked for the website [www.burkinadiaspora.bf](http://www.burkinadiaspora.bf) which is referenced on the cover page of the CSBE Guidebook noted above. But there is no content at this website. When you access it you get a message “It works!” (in English), but the message goes on to say that there is no content yet available on the site.
- We also checked the official government portal site, [www.primature.gov.bf](http://www.primature.gov.bf) and tried various searches (in both French and English) to find information relevant to migrant workers and/or human rights, but did not find any other sites of interest.

If we have missed any other relevant sites we apologize for that, and would recommend that such sites be linked to one or both of the main sites identified above.

### **Background; challenges**

- Burkina Faso is a very poor country in West Africa. At least 46% below the poverty line. Very little Internet access. Modest levels of mobile phone usage.
- Many of the relevant migrant workers are in low skilled agricultural and similar fields, where access to the Internet or other technologies is unlikely
- French is the official language but up to 90% of the people use as their primary language one of the 66 or more local languages. It is not clear what percent speak French in addition to their primary language.
- The country also has a very low literacy rate, under 30%. Perhaps the lowest in the world according to some sources.

These circumstances present obvious challenges for the effective use of the Internet and new technologies. But recent telecommunications data indicate that Internet and mobile phone usage is increasing rapidly in the developing world, including in Burkina Faso. Approximately 4% of the population have Internet usage, and 43% have mobile phones.<sup>1</sup> According to the ITU the developing world's use of the Internet has gone from 8% in 2005 to 31% in 2013.<sup>2</sup> If a similar trend continues over the next 5-10 years, 50% to 75% of all people in the developing world could soon have access to the Internet. Technology companies like Google and Facebook are periodically announcing new projects to expand Internet availability to these countries. Even anecdotal evidence from Peace Corps volunteers and travelers who live and travel through Burkina Faso indicates that nearly every major village has an Internet Café or hotspot of some type.<sup>3</sup>

Also, even though Internet services inside the country are limited, many Burkinabes living and working abroad will have better access to the Internet than their friends back home. If a friend or family member can notify them of a new government website that contains useful information, they may be able to better access it from where they are currently living.

### **Our comments and suggestions:**

We congratulate the government of Burkina Faso for establishing these website resources and using the Internet to provide information to migrant workers inside and outside of the country. The CSBE Guidebook in particular, provides much useful reference information to the Burkinabe diaspora.

However, we believe much more could be done to provide useful information. We have the following suggestions:

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia "list of countries by Internet users" (all countries, 2012 figures), "list of top 64 countries by number of mobile phones in use (2012); World Bank mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people) (all countries, 2012), <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.CEL.SETS.P2> ; CIA World Factbook (total number of mobile cellular telephone subscribers, 2011 figures, compared to 2013 population data).

<sup>2</sup> International Telecommunications Union, Worldwide Internet Users, 2005, 2010 and 2013.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Peace Corps Guide to Volunteers ("Computer access is available at private Internet cafes in many towns and cities and, .... Wireless coverage, when available, can be slow. Unlocked smart phones can provide Internet access almost anywhere. In smaller villages, there may not be electricity, but there are almost always places to charge electronic equipment for a small fee."); Peace Corps volunteer's blog, <http://marikotravels.blogspot.be/2013/> (peace corps volunteer in Burkina Faso who is maintaining a blog through the Internet on her experiences; she is based in a small village about 100 km from Ouagadougou, near the village of Kaya). o traveled across Africa including Burkina Faso in 2006nt,Bobo Diolosso)

1. **CSBE Guidebook.** The CSBE Guidebook does not contain the official government website information on its title page. The website that is shown on the cover does not currently have any content and it is apparently not an official government website ([www.burkinadiasapora.bf](http://www.burkinadiasapora.bf)). In addition the Guidebook itself contains primarily procedural and reference information. It does not cover substantive “know your rights” types of information for migrant workers. For example:
  - a. There is no reference to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
  - b. There is no reference to the rights under the relevant ILO conventions or under other human rights treaties
  - c. There is no reference to this Committee’s website, or any other resource sites that have “know your rights” information
  - d. There is a brief reference to the IOM on page 23, but it does not include any website or other contact information
  - e. Even though the Guidebook is offered in an electronic format, there is very little information concerning website and email addresses of the referenced organisations. The one exception is educational institutions, each of which are listed with website and email information. Also, some of the banking institutions are also identified with electronic addresses.
  - f. Information like this gets out of date quickly. The government should commit to a regular updating of the Guidebook, for example perhaps every two years. Alternatively the website itself should be updated in html language rather than produce a PDF format Guidebook.
  
2. **Consular websites in diaspora countries.** Embassy and consular offices in countries where Burkinabes are working should have information on what the rights of migrant workers are in those states and who to contact for rights-based problems that are encountered. Of the 83 countries listed in various sources as hosting Burkinabes,<sup>4</sup> at least 14 such states have ratified this Convention.<sup>5</sup> Note that even amongst the six countries that border Burkina Faso, three of them have ratified the Convention (Ghana, Mali and Niger). The other three have ratified nearly all of the other major human rights and ILO conventions (Benin, Cote d’Ivoire and Togo). When looking at the migrant workers rights under ILO conventions and the other major human rights treaties (rights of non-citizens), the coverage goes up even higher.<sup>6</sup>

Cote d’Ivoire, which is reputed to be the number one destination for Burkinabe migrant workers, has ratified all of the other core human rights treaties: CCPR, CESC, CERD, CEDAW, CAT, CRC and the two CRC optional protocols (on child soldiers and trafficking). In addition they have ratified ILO Conventions 29 and 105 on forced labour.

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<sup>4</sup> The 83 countries were collected as an informal grouping, based on various expat network and migration resources on the Internet. The number 83 should not be viewed as an official, precise total. The list is not worthwhile including here in this paper, but if anyone would like a copy of it, please email us. Of the 83 countries, 31 were in Africa, 21 in Asia, 20 in Europe, 6 in North America and 4 in Latin America.

<sup>5</sup> Algeria, Argentina, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Turkey are identified as Burkinabe Diaspora countries and have ratified the Convention (14).

<sup>6</sup> Of the 83 countries that have some Burkinabe diaspora, 73 have ratified ILO Conventions 29 and 105 on forced labour, 16 have ratified ILO 97 on migrant workers, 8 have ratified ILO 143 on the supplementary provisions for migrant workers, and 4 have ratified the new Domestic Workers Convention ILO 189 (which of course has not yet come into force). Nearly all of the 83 Diaspora countries have ratified most of the other core human rights treaties.

Each consular site should contain specific or at least general information about the CMW, ILO and other instruments which protect the human rights that may apply in their country, with links to the relevant resource and ratification information of each treaty.

3. **Treaty body reporting site.** Currently no information could be found at the websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Human Rights, or the Geneva Permanent Mission of Burkina Faso, on the treaty body reporting obligations of the state party. The Ministry of Human Rights (or other appropriate agency) should maintain a general treaty body reporting site, which identifies:
  - a. the regional and international treaties to which Burkina Faso is a party,
  - b. the latest reports submitted to each treaty body,
  - c. the latest core report,
  - d. the latest concluding observations of each treaty body,
  - e. the schedule of next appearances before any treaty body,
  - f. deadlines for submitting next reports or followup information,
  - g. progress toward implementation and consultation opportunities for civil society,
  - h. information about the live and archived treaty body webcasts of appearances of the state party before any Committee
  - i. the site should be disability accessible
  - j. the content of the site should be regularly updated; the site should indicate when the content was last revised and the government's policy for how frequently it intends to update it in order to keep the information current
  
4. **In-country information resources.** Burkina Faso has at least four types of migrant worker groups protected by the Convention within the country.
  - a. Foreign migrant workers and their families who are living and working in Burkina Faso (country of employment)
  - b. Families of Burkinabes whose family members are working abroad (country of origin)
  - c. Burkinabes who are seasonal migrant workers in another country but who happen to be living in Burkina Faso at the present time (country of origin)
  - d. Burkinabes returning permanently home, to be reintegrated into the society

Each of these groups could benefit from a government website that provides information about migrant worker rights. Even if a person or family living in Burkina Faso does not have Internet access themselves, they may know someone who does or their family member abroad may have access. Growth of Internet access over the next several years, also makes it worthwhile to develop robust information websites now so that they are stable and online as Internet usage in the country increases.

In circumstances like these, the priority should be to get a useful website up and running, and then to publicize heavily the website address so that people know the site exists and they can tell others about it. Here are some of the ways a website like this can be publicized in a country like Burkina Faso:

- Public billboards and the sides of government vehicles – publicizing the website address
- Posters and pamphlets at major transit and border centers
- Public service announcements on local TV, radio and newspaper media
- Press releases

- Use social media, especially Twitter, to announce the new website. Periodically repeat the information.<sup>7</sup>
- The Ombudsman office, the National Human Rights Commission, and the Commission on Information Technology and Freedoms should have posters and pamphlets available on migrant workers rights; and to the extent these agencies have their own websites, those websites should provide a link to migrant workers rights information
- In its latest Report to CERD<sup>8</sup> the state party reported that it was establishing formal and informal education centres throughout the country to help overcome the literacy challenge and to include human rights education as part of the curriculum. The information about migrant workers rights discussed in this paper should be made available at those guidance centers, as well as cards and pamphlets promoting the website address. Ideally computer and Internet access should be provided at these centres, so that people can become familiar with the website features.
- Seek help from local civil society organisations in disseminating the information to their stakeholders, including NGOs focusing on problems of trafficking
- Request local mobile phone and Internet service providers to offer bookmarks to the government human rights sites in the initial start up interface available when a new phone or ISP account is set up
- Computer training courses should include links to helpful government websites as part of the training materials
- Posters and pamphlets with website information should be made available at local Internet cafes

**5. Dealing with the challenges of illiteracy and multiple languages.** There are a growing number of software tools and websites, often available for free, that can translate any text from one language to another. In addition there are sites that can read the text out loud to you so that you can listen to it and don't have to read it in written form. For example at Google Translate, you can input text from any of more than 60 languages, translate it to any other of those languages, and then click the speaker icon in the lower right hand corner of the page to listen to the translated text read aloud to you. Google has recently announced it will be adding six more African languages<sup>9</sup>, with plans to continue to increase the number of languages served. Other similar translation and audio reader services are also available.

We would recommend that the state party approach technology and software companies like Google and request that the most heavily used local languages of Burkina Faso also be put on the list of future language additions on Google Translate or on similar sites. A few applications of this technology are the following:

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<sup>7</sup> In this regard, it is useful to note that the Twitter hashtag #Burkinabe generates many active messages in the last several months (tweets). Most of these tweets pertain to football, especially Burkina Faso's chances at next year's World Cup. This would seem to indicate that use of this hashtag is likely to get information to many Burkinabes living abroad. You might adopt the practice of other institutions who cross-promote new websites and upcoming programs through new or unique hashtags that would allow interested persons to follow your new posted developments. For example, the Secretariat of the Human Rights Council in Geneva recently promoted the upcoming 24<sup>th</sup> session of the Council by posting the following notice under the commonly used hashtag #humanrights: "Thank you for following us on Twitter! Hashtag #HRC24 for information related to the upcoming 24th session of the #HumanRights Council."

<sup>8</sup> CERD/C/BFA/1p2-19 (6 November 2012), p.18.

<sup>9</sup> **From The Guardian, 29 Aug 2013:** Google is planning to add Somali, Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and Zulu to its list of language options on [Google Translate](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/29/google-translate-african-languages), the search engine giant's free automatic translation service.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/29/google-translate-african-languages>

- When these language translation features become available, the government website can also provide links to them so that the user can go directly to a translation site if they would like to view or hear the text in their preferred language.
  - Even before Google can translate into local languages, some persons in Burkina Faso might benefit from the audio reader functionality in the French language. Perhaps they can understand French when it is spoken, but have difficulty reading it in written form. The government could add special links on its website that read out a spoken word version of the latest Concluding Observations or the latest press release about human rights.
  - Make available audio recordings of Internet content in as many local languages as possible, using translation and audio readers.
  - Perhaps such recordings can be produced in a way that can be accessed or streamed to a mobile phone.
  - Make sure these recordings are also available in local ethnic group community centers, libraries, and other common meeting places, in formats that can be used in those locations (for example, audio cassette tapes or mp3 recordings on a USB stick)
6. **Disability access.** We note that Burkina Faso is a party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In this regard, all websites and electronic tools should be made disability accessible to the extent practicable. In the case of websites, there are relatively simple site design guidelines that should be followed.
7. **Measuring traffic to the sites.** Since generating traffic to the site is a key indicator of how effective the promotion, awareness and content of the website has been, it is also important to measure and report the traffic to the new websites when the sites are first created, and periodically thereafter.

## CONCLUSION

Thank you for this opportunity to present these comments to the Committee and the delegation from Burkina Faso. We hope they are useful to you. We are happy to provide additional information or advice if requested.

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The Advocates for Human Rights

<http://ProjectEleanor.blogspot.com> (a blog about the treaty bodies)

<http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org> (main NGO site)

You can also follow us on Twitter at: @PennyLParker and @The\_Advocates