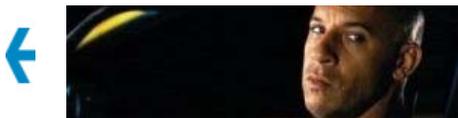


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Is Abu Dhabi the New Sun City?

Posted September 27, 2007 | 12:40 PM (EST)

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Warner Bros. just proudly announced a new joint partnership with the United Arab Emirates region of **Abu Dhabi**. How proud Time Warner must be over this agreement which *The Hollywood Reporter* says will be worth billions of dollars over time. They're building movie multiplexes, creating Donald Duck video games, going 50-50 on funding broad appeal blockbusters...oh, and giving legitimacy and a veneer of decency to a government that refuses to sign international **human rights treaties**, flogs its own people, has a police force that -- according to the Bush administration -- enables the beating of women and treats the "guest workers" that power its economy as de facto slaves.

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Would Warner Bros. have signed a flashy deal with the apartheid-era South Africa and given that country its stamp of approval by putting in stores at Sun City? Shouldn't they feel the same about Abu Dhabi? The UAE is trying to use film festivals and "culture" to turn Abu Dhabi into a popular tourist site and put a

veener of decency on a country that is a nightmare for many of the people who live and work there.

Well, Warner Bros. is far from alone. AmFAR, the worthy charity that raises funds to fight AIDS, has sold its soul by agreeing to give legitimacy to Abu Dhabi and its desire to host a major film festival.

AmFAR is holding one of its celebrity-studded charity events there this December, with Sharon Stone cajoling the rich and famous into bidding for lavish gifts and donating the proceeds to AIDS work. (Vacations at Abu Dhabi have been auctioned off in the past.) But morally, if you hold such an event at Abu Dhabi, doesn't it become a zero sum game at best? Should you really make a deal to get desperately needed funds for AIDS in exchange for looking the other way at the slave labor that makes your stay at Abu Dhabi so "pleasant?" Stone deserves credit for her tireless charity work and AmFAR might argue they'd hold an auction in hell if it meant raising money for the important work they'd do. But that's still a deal with the devil.

Here are the facts: Abu Dhabi is a monarchy, and not the quaint kind of Great Britain. The people



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who are actual citizens may be rich, thanks to oil. But they have no rights. According to the latest State Department annual report on the United Arab Emirates, less than 20 percent of the people who live there even qualify as citizens.

That human rights report from the Bush administration came out in March and details the following, "The government's respect for human rights remained problematic...flogging as judicially sanctioned punishment; arbitrary detention and incommunicado detention, both permitted by law...domestic abuse of women, sometimes enabled by police; trafficking in women and children; legal and societal discrimination against women and non-citizens...common abuse of foreign domestic servants; and severe restrictions on and abuses of workers' rights."

Indeed, workers imported to the UAE have their passports taken away, suffer tremendously and have no outlets -- **other than rioting** -- to get their voices heard. If they try to leave, they're often threatened and told they won't get any of the money that's due to them.

Some progress has been made: the abuse of little boys as camel jockeys has presumably ended because the international outcry was so loud the last few years. (It's hard to know for sure -- Abu Dhabi refuses to allow human rights observers into the country.) But that's far from the only abuses in the UAE where women are treated like chattel, foreign workers are treated like slaves and gays -- as in Iran -- simply don't exist thanks to repression and laws that outlaw homosexuality. (After one raid on gays in 2005 the Bush administration felt obliged to tell Abu Dhabi that **forcing the prisoners to take hormones** would break international law.)

The irony of holding an AIDS benefit in a country that outlaws gays can hardly be overstated. The greed of doing business with them is also obvious -- especially business without any guarantees of change or humane treatment of "guest workers" that will invariably be involved in these ventures one way or another. You simply can't work in Abu Dhabi without benefiting from this slave labor.

And what future progress will be made if the rich decide Abu Dhabi -- like Sun City -- is a lovely place to vacation, if celebrities endorse it with their presence while women suffer and die and if multinational corporations do business there while turning a blind eye to abuses? How can anyone justify setting up shop in a country that refuses to sign standard international human rights treaties?

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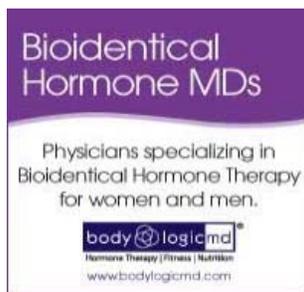
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JScott [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of JScott](#) [permalink](#)

And you notice Porky Pig is/will be noticeably absent in any WB venture in that part of the world. Who signs off all the 'that's all folks' at the end of the WB cartoons there?

[Favorite](#) [Flag as abusive](#) Posted 11:25 AM on 09/30/2007

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That's a funny question. I've no idea, but will def ask the next time I get a WB animator on the phone.

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itolduso [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of itolduso](#) [permalink](#)

Where do the busboys sleep that work in your favorite Greek or Italian restaurant? Look in the attics & flooded basements-you might be surprised by what you find. We treat our foreign workers as badly as anyone- and worse than some. But why not take a look at how we treat our own citizens compared to the U.A.E.-you want to talk about women? Every child in the U.A.E. is provided free education-all the way to university-and more women graduate with degrees than men. Under their Constitution, women enjoy the same legal status, claim to titles, access to education and the same right to practice their professions as men. Here in the U.S. we are still waiting for the Equal Rights Amendment. And if you believe that gays are safer in the U.S. then obviously you don't get around much-and don't tap your toes in an airport mensroom or you could find yourself in one of our secret prisons-and they can decide to hold you indefinitely without charges, access to an attorney or ever going to trial. Right here in the U.S.A. We need to clean up our own act.

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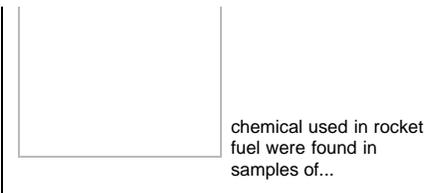
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Thanks for reading. I suggest you also read the Bush administration's annual report on human right abuses in the UAE. Suggesting women have the same rights in the AUE is silly. Suggesting gay people in the UAE are just as safe as gays in America is ludicrous. Criticizing conditions in any country does not suggest or imply that conditions in the country you come from are perfect. But arguing for better conditions for illegal immigrants here in the US doesn't negate the terrible conditions in the UAE. You can of course criticize the conditions in both countries. If your response to any criticism about the gov't in apartheid South African or the Soviet Union or the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan or Burma/Myanmar is to insist that the US has issues too, then no one would ever strive to improve conditions anywhere in the world. And if you think the human rights abuses are just as bad in the US as those countries, simply ask someone who has ever lived there and you'll see how wrong you are.

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visit any 'SuperMax' prison in America, look into how many years men are kept in isolation (23 hour a day lockdown, one shower a week, no contact, one hour in a cement yard with only a small patch of sky, rotting teeth eating a hole in their cheek, hernia's left to fester till their blood's poisoned-that happened in Illinois)One man's been there a decade so far-this is America. How many restaurants,



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hotels, fast food facilities, produce farms, & factories in America would open tomorrow if all of the mexican workers didn't show up? They are treated as poorly here as any guest worker in the U.A.E. - tomato pickers suffer pesticide exposure, with blistered rashes, miscarriages, muscle spasms and painful cramps, vision loss and birth defects- yet they continue to bring them in on 'special work visa's' and crowd them into warehouses with each family sleeping in a tiny stall, no bathroom facilities (just port-a-potties), no washing machines-the contaminated clothing from the fields spreading it's poison to their bedding.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 09:29 PM on 09/28/2007

Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

I too dislike the cruel conditions of some of our prisons where no attempt is made at rehabilitation and prisoners are sometimes housed in such psychologically horrendous situations that upon release they are guaranteed to be incapable of mainstreaming back into society. But those abuses are written about and discussed and people campaign to change or improve them. The same with treatment of illegal immigrants, stories about which you can read in your newspapers, watch on TV, attend rallies to protest (such as the rallies last year that were among the biggest protests in America since Vietnam). That doesn't happen in the UAE where conditions are worse by a factor of ten for the vast majority of the people. It's easy to say "we've got problems too," but if you can try and improve conditions for anyone anywhere in the world, why wouldn't you? You wanna campaign to improve conditions for illegal immigrants in California? I support you. Why attack someone else trying to improve conditions anywhere else in the world? We all benefit anytime any country increases its standards of human decency.

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Apples See Profile I'm a Fan of Apples permalink

It's difficult to know how to respond to your article, Michael. You've illustrated the hypocrisy well, plus you've reminded me of things I was already aware of, but had forgotten.

I've had respect for Sharon Stone in the past, and I agree that any kind of much needed charity work is a worthy thing, but perhaps by her boycotting such an event this time around, and being public about it, she may in fact be doing a much broader cause of social good. How many Americans really know anything about Abu Dhabi and its horrendous abuses? Any country that refuses to allow human rights observers onto its soil has plenty to hide and needs to be exposed.

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I like Stone very much and she's been a tireless champion of AmFAR. I hope she and they re-think their involvement with the UAE. Anyone doing any business or even holding a charity event in the UAE (which will invariably give it prominence and a veneer of respectability) should have to demand far more in changes (a la the Sullivan Rules in South Africa) before agreeing to base there even briefly.

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realitytrumpsbull See Profile I'm a Fan of realitytrumpsbull permalink

So, when's the boycott? And, why don't they ever have gircotts? LOL

Our country, moreover our world, is run by rich people with loose scruples. Anything goes if the Price Is Right, right?

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 01:22 PM on 09/28/2007

Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

Happily, though rich people have exorbitant power in this country -- just as they do in every country of the world -- we've got a lot more freedom to stand up to them and change the laws of society than the people and "guest workers" in the UAE.

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Whoops. Someone has Vegas on the mind. Thanks for the catch. And what do you think about the comparison between Abu Dhabi and that apartheid-era tourism center in South Africa?

Posted 01:45 PM on 09/27/2007

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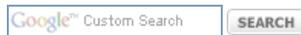
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I think for your analogy to work you perhaps mean "SUN" City??

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