Resolution on Bangladesh

2007/2620(RSP) - 06/09/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 6 September 2007, the European Parliament adopted a joint resolution on Bangladesh. It recalled that a state of emergency was declared on 11 January 2007 and that the parliamentary elections which were to be held in Bangladesh on 22 January 2007 were postponed after poll-related violence, with the EU Election Observation Mission suspending its operations on that day. The military-backed Caretaker Government has introduced repressive measures, including a ban on all political activity, the detention or charging of over 160 political leaders. Frequent violations of freedom of the press, including arrests and cases of torture, have been reported.

Parliament stated that was deeply concerned about the disproportionate response of the military and the police against the student protests which erupted in late August 2007 at Dhaka university. These demonstrations were evidence of the unpopular political role played by the army. It called for the immediate release of the persons who have been arrested including members of the teachers' association Shikkhok Samity. It was also deeply concerned about the arrest and justification for ongoing detention of Awami League president Sheikh Hasina, charged with extortion, and of Bangladesh Nationalist Party president Khaleda Zia, aslo charged with corruption. Parliament called on the Bangladeshi authorities to conduct the trial in a transparent way and according to the rule of law. More particularly, the government must base its anti-corruption campaign solely on facts relevant in the context of criminal proceedings concerning corruption. Members then expressed their deep concern about the conditions under which Sigma Huda, human rights lawyer and UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, is imprisoned. The Bangladeshi authorities were urged to provide Ms Huda with all the necessary medical treatment and help required by her condition, and to respect her fundamental rights of Ms Huda. The Bangladeshi authorities must also allow access to all tribunals by international human rights organisations, interested parties and international observers such as EU Member State diplomats or the Commission delegation staff, to ascertain that proceedings are fair and impartial.

Parliament went on to regret that the Caretaker Government, while making progress on tackling corruption, has been far less assertive on political reform, and it called for a return to democracy and the lifting of the state of emergency in Bangladesh, with particular reference to the lifting of the ban on all political activity, in order to enable all parties and political organisations to prepare for open and fair elections. There must be an end to the creeping militarisation of the country. Parliament was deeply concerned about the role of the Bangladeshi Military Intelligence Service ('DGFI'), and the allegations of torture of persons held in custody. It called on the Bangladeshi Government to refrain from any arbitrary expulsions of slum dwellers and landless peasants from urban roadsides and fallow lands, in line with the High Court's ruling, and to undertake the necessary evictions only on the basis of well prepared rehabilitation plans. The Caretaker Government was asked to make progress with the creation of a National Human Rights Commission, the implementation of which should also be a priority for the future civilian government.

Lastly, Parliament called on the Council and the Commission to monitor carefully the human rights and political situation in Bangladesh in the light of recent events and to make representations concerning the continuance of the state of emergency. The working groups established between the EU and Bangladesh on institution building, administrative reform, governance and human rights must contribute actively to stabilising democracy in Bangladesh.