Resolution on women's rights in Saudi Arabia

2007/2681(RSP) - 13/12/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

Following the debate in plenary, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on women's rights in Saudi Arabia. It insisted that the Saudi Arabian Government take further steps aimed at lifting restrictions on women's rights, including their freedom of movement, on the driving prohibition, on their employment opportunities, on their legal personality and on their representation in judicial processes, eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in private and public life and promote their participation in the economic, social and political spheres.

It recalled that in October 2006 a 19-year-old woman, known as 'the Qatif Girl', was sentenced to 90 lashes following an incident in which she was alone in a car talking with a man who was not a close relative when she was attacked and gang-raped. Parliament was deeply concerned by the fact that the General Court of Qatif (Saudi Arabia) reviewed the sentence in November 2007 and condemned her to six months in prison and 200 lashes. It deplored this decision to punish the rape victim, and called on the Saudi Arabian authorities to quash the sentence and drop all charges against the victim of the rape.

Parliament also recalled other cases, including that of the couple Fatima and Mansour Al-Timani, parents of two children, who were forcibly divorced in July 2007 on the request of the wife's brother, based on the argument that Fatima's tribal lineage was superior to that of her husband. It drew particular attention to the case of Rizana Nafeek, a Sri Lankan domestic worker who was sentenced to capital punishment in June 2007 for the death of an infant in her custody when she was only 17 years old, and of the Indonesian domestic workers Siti Tarwiyah Slamet and Susmiyati Abdul Fulan, who were beaten to death by their employing family in August 2007 while two others were critically wounded.

The resolution noted that, on 3 October 2007, King Abdullah announced a judicial reform, promising the setting-up of new specialised courts and improved training for judges and lawyers. It recalled that, in May 2007, it was reported that King Abdullah had ordered that a new court be established which would specialise in hearing domestic violence cases. Members felt that a campaign to promote awareness regarding violence against women in Saudi Arabia, especially domestic violence, would be a most welcome initiative, which should be introduced as a matter of urgency. They urged the authorities to revise and enforce national labour laws in order to provide the same protection for domestic workers as existed for workers of other branches and to ensure prosecution of employers responsible for sexual or physical abuse, and labour rights abuses that violate existing national laws.

The Government of Saudi Arabia was asked to review all cases of child offenders who had been condemned to death, to suspend the death sentence for child offenders and to introduce a moratorium on capital punishment. Parliament called on the Council and the Commission to raise these issues at the next Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting between the EU and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.