# Annual report on human rights in the world 2007 and the EU's policy on the matter

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Marco **CAPPATO** (ADLE, IT) on the 2007 Annual Report on Human Rights in the World, and regretted the fact that the European Union is still far from conducting a coherent and hard-hitting policy to uphold and promote human rights around the world. MEPs expect substantial progress to be made in this area, as well as the strengthening of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP), which is largely influenced by national interests. In addition, it is necessary to maintain the Union's efforts to improve the ability of the European Union to respond rapidly to breaches of human rights by third countries and therefore better mainstream human rights policy into all external European Union policies.

**General principles and proposals on human rights, democracy, peace and non-violence**: MEPs reaffirm that human rights are universal, historically acquired rights, effective respect for which is an essential means of guaranteeing the enforcement of international law and order, and the promotion of peace, freedom, justice and democracy in the world. It is for this reason that these rights must be defended globally in all courts, including supranational courts. Consequently, the Commission and the Council must take priority action – along the same lines as for the establishment of the International Criminal Court – to support the activities of all international courts involved in protecting human rights.

Although MEPs reaffirm the right to democracy in all countries, they also believe the promotion of Ghandian **non-violence** to be the most appropriate means of ensuring that fundamental human rights are respected. To further support this action, MEPs suggest that a European Conference on Non-Violence be convened in 2009 and that 2010 be designated 'European Year of Non-Violence'. They also call on the Member States to endeavour, under the auspices of the United Nations, to ensure that the 'Decade of Non-Violence 2010-2020' is proclaimed.

**EU activities in the area of human rights in 2007**: MEPs recall the value that they attach to the EU report on human rights, as a fundamental instrument to appraise the Union's current activities in this area. However, this report should provide more information, and of a higher quality, on the situation in certain countries. Moreover, MEPs reiterate their call for a regular periodic assessment of the implementation and the results of European Union policies and instruments regarding human rights.

Due to the recurring inability of the EU to respond to and resolve crises, MEPs call on the Council to transform gradually the civilian aspects of the European Security and Defence Policy into a '**Civil Peace Service**', responsible for the management of short-term civilian crises and longer-term peace building. Once again, they reiterate their request for the Commission to encourage European Union Member States and third countries to ratify all core United Nations and Council of Europe human rights conventions and for Member States to cooperate with the Council of Europe more efficiently.

Turning to the work of international actors, Members see the new UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) as having the potential to develop into a valuable framework to improve global human rights. However, the Committee regrets that during 2007 the United Nations' human rights record has not improved. It continues to press for the establishment of membership criteria for election to the UNHRC. It also encourages all Member States to ratify urgently the Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court (ICC), particularly the Czech Republic which is the only remaining EU Member State not to have ratified this text. Romania is also called to rescind its Bilateral Immunity Agreement with the USA regarding the ICC.

**Combating the death penalty**: MEPs repeatedly return to the actions taken by the Union during 2007 and, once again, call for the creation of a new European External Action Service to harmonise the approaches of Member States' missions and the

Commission abroad in the area of human rights, the idea being to create genuine 'European Union embassies'. Although they consider the adoption of a Resolution by the United Nations calling for a global moratorium on the use of the death penalty as a giant step in 2007, MEPs still seek the **universal abolition of the death penalty**. Welcoming the decision by the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 7 December 2007 to establish a European Day against the Death Penalty (10 October each year), MEPs also welcome the abolition of the death penalty in Albania, Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, in the State of New Jersey (USA) and Uzbekistan in 2007 and the beginning of 2008. However, once again, they criticise China as the latter still carries out the greatest number of executions worldwide. The same is true for Belarus and Iran.

**Torture and other inhuman treatment**: MEPs are astonished at the number of European countries that have still not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture. They call for the creation of a Europe-wide **zone free from torture** and hope that the fight against torture and ill treatment will become a top priority of human rights policy at EU level. In addition, more concrete actions are awaited in order to fight against the enrolment of children in armed conflict.

**Human rights defenders**: MEPs wish to stress the role of "human rights defenders", who are often in the front line during conflicts. These people deserve much more effective protection. For this reason, they call for specific guidelines on human rights defenders as well as the possibility of giving them emergency visas, such as those that exist in Ireland and Spain. They make a series of recommendations to the Council on the way in which they foresee dialogues and official consultations with third countries. In particular, they reiterate their call for human rights issues to be reviewed at the highest political level with third countries, in order to give these issues more weight at bilateral level.

**China, Iran et Russia**: although MEPs consider all of the third countries where human rights are violated, it is mainly China, Iran and Russia which are singled out for persistent and serious violations of human rights.

- **China, with a view to the forthcoming Olympic Games**: MEPs firstly emphasise that despite promises made by the Chinese regime with a view to the forthcoming Olympic Games in accordance with the Olympic Charter, the situation on the ground regarding human rights has not improved in China. However, the Beijing Olympic Games constitute an important historic opportunity to make progress in this area. MEPs recall the blacklisting of journalists and human rights activists, including the Dalai Lama and Falun Gong practitioners. Again, they call for the immediate release of the prominent AIDS activist Hu Jia. They urge the EU to ensure that its trading relationship with China **is contingent on human rights reforms**, and call on the Council to make a comprehensive evaluation of the human rights situation before finalising any new Partnership and Cooperation Framework Agreement;
- **Iran**: MEPs recall that the human rights dialogue with Iran has been interrupted since 2004. Therefore, it is necessary to resume this dialogue with the Iranian authorities, and to consolidate the involvement of all Iranian human rights defenders and civil society representatives in policymaking processes, as the situation seriously deteriorated in 2007 with the increased use of capital punishment. Iran is also condemned by MEPs for arresting thousands of men and women in moves to 'counter immoral behaviour';
- **Russia**: MEPs r egret the lack of results from the European Union-Russia consultations on human rights and regret that the European Union has not succeeded in bringing about policy change in Russia, particularly in Chechnya and other Caucasian Republics. MEPs protest against the arrest of human rights defenders and political prisoners (including Mikhail Khodorkovsky), the lack of

independence of the media, the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, etc. They are equally concerned about the many NGOs in Russia that are victims of harassment, and they deplore Russia's unwillingness to invite international election observers during elections.

In addition, MEPs protest against the deplorable situation regarding human rights in the Maghreb countries, in Syria and in Uzbekistan. Efforts are still awaited in Turkey, a candidate country for EU-accession. MEPs also single out Sudan (Darfur), Burma and Pakistan for their lack of progress.

**Women's rights**: MEPs wish for bolder measures to combat female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices. They insist that women's rights be explicitly addressed in all human rights dialogues, and in particular the combating and elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, including, gender-selected abortion, domestic violence and femicide.

**The role of the Council Presidencies in 2007** (Germany and Portugal) **and of the EIDHR**: on the whole, these presidencies are congratulated on their achievements in 2007, with notable progress made towards finalising EU guidelines on the rights of the child. However, MEPs regret the lack of a visible European policy on human rights and call for quantifiable indices and benchmarks to measure the effectiveness of actions taken. MEPs also examine the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), welcoming its effectiveness. However, the budget of this fundamental instrument remains significantly below expectations. It is for this reason that MEPs propose that the EIDHR's budget be increased from 2009 so that projects in 'difficult' regions can be managed directly by the Commission delegations in third countries. Moreover, MEPs note that a large proportion of the total EIDHR funding for projects went to big thematic projects and only a small proportion (24%) to country-based support schemes (equivalent to micro-projects). They also note that only a small part of the funds were destined for Asia. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink the geographical balance.

**European Parliament's interventions**: acknowledging that human rights play a prominent role in the work of the European Parliament itself, MEPs recall the impact of the report produced last year by the Temporary Committee on the alleged use of European countries by the CIA for "rendition flights". The Committee refers also to the holding of regular "urgency" debates and resolutions on human rights voted in plenary. MEPs call on the Council to attend these debates more regularly and to take these into account. They also call for the resolutions on human rights to be translated into the languages spoken in the target areas. Lastly, they call for Parliament to be involved in the EU's human rights dialogues and consultations with partner countries.