Resolution on Bangladesh

2008/2617(RSP) - 10/07/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 10 July 2008, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on Bangladesh. The resolution had been tabled for consideration in plenary by the EPP-ED, PES, ALDE, UEN, Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL groups. It recalls that on 11 January 2007, amid violence in the run-up to the election, the caretaker government of Bangladesh imposed a state of emergency and shortly afterwards adopted Emergency Power Rules giving the army and the paramilitary forces the same arrest powers as the police. The EU Election Observation Mission then suspended its operations on 22 January 2007. Furthermore, on 11 June 2008 a new counterterrorism ordinance was adopted without public input, violating fundamental freedoms and basic fair trial rights and introducing a broad definition of 'terrorist acts', which now includes mere property crimes as well as attacks against individuals. The number of people reportedly arrested since the introduction of the state of emergency 18 months ago has risen to well over 300 000.

Parliament calls on the Bangladeshi Government to lift the state of emergency as the most important step in preparing for the holding of the country's next parliamentary elections and so that local council elections can take place in August 2008. It calls on the Council and the Commission to play a more proactive role and to impress on the Bangladesh Government the need for a speedy and complete lifting of the state of emergency and of all regulations adopted under its auspices.

Members also calls on the Bangladeshi Government to do the following :

- ensure that its new counterterrorism ordinance meets internationally recognised legal standards on combating terrorism, such as those recommended by the UN Special Rapporteur on Counterterrorism and Human Rights;

- abolish the death penalty;

- put an end to the recent wave of mass arrests and the harassment of political opponents or journalists under the state of emergency. Parliament expresses concern at reports of torture by the authorities.

- guarantee to all detainees their basic right to due process and to those charged a fair trial. The authorities must either to charge the thousands detained on the basis of credible evidence or release them.

- provide maximum scope for a large-scale mobilisation of all sections of society, environmental and other non-governmental organisations, journalists and scientists in order to prepare the country for the forthcoming climate change-induced disasters. Parliament considers emergency rule as an alarming obstacle to achieving this goal.

The armed forces are asked withdraw from involvement in the political process.

The caretaker government is congratulated, however, on progress in preparing for parliamentary elections and on making essential progress with the reform of the electoral process and the drawing-up of an accurate electoral register by the authorities. The government is asked to ensure that members of Bangladesh's ethnic and religious minorities are in a position freely to cast their votes, and that there is freedom of the press in the pre-electoral period in Bangladesh. The release of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on humanitarian grounds is welcomed.

Parliament calls for free and fair elections conducted in accordance with international standards, with the participation of all parties. The EU Election Observation Mission is asked to resume its activities as soon as this is feasible and advisable. EU Member State missions and the Commission Delegation in Bangladesh must monitor the human rights and political situation in Bangladesh carefully.

Lastly, Members note that as much as a quarter of Bangladesh's territory faces the threat of being permanently submerged by rising levels of sea water in the Bay of Bengal, and climate scientists warn that Bangladesh may have 20 to 25 million climate refugees by 2050. They believe that the G8 Summit has an enormous responsibility to avert further acceleration in climate change and an increase in the number of catastrophes that threaten the lives of millions of people in Bangladesh and elsewhere by adopting effective and far-reaching measures to curb CO2 emissions.