Resolution on the situation of Burmese refugees in Thailand

2009/2528(RSP) - 05/02/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of the same day, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the situation of Burmese refugees in Thailand. The resolution had been tabled for consideration in plenary by the EPP-ED, PES, ALDE, and UEN, GUE/NGL and Greens/ALE, groups.

The resolution follws the reports that around 1 000 Rohingya boat people from Burma were intercepted by the navy in Thai territorial waters between 18 and 30 December 2008. They were subsequently towed into international waters without navigational equipment or sufficient food and water. Many of those boat people are missing and feared drowned while some of them were rescued by Indonesian or Indian coastguards. The Thai authorities have denied those accusations.

Members note that the Rohingya people, a mainly Muslim ethnic community in western Burma, are subjected to systematic, persistent and widespread human rights violations by the ruling military regime. In recent years thousands of Burmese have fled their home country because of repression and wide-spread hunger.

Parliament deplores reports of inhumane treatment inflicted on the Rohingya refugees and urges the Government of Thailand, as a respected member of the international community well-known for its hospitality towards refugees, to take all necessary measures to ensure that the lives of Rohingya people are not at risk and that they are treated in accordance with humanitarian standards. The resolution strongly condemns the continuous persecution of the Rohingya people by the Burmese Government, which holds prime responsibility for the plight of the refugees. It demands the restoration of the Burmese citizenship of the Rohingya people, the immediate lifting of all restrictions on their freedom of movement and their right to be educated and marry, the cessation of religious persecution and the destruction of mosques and other places of worship, and an end to all human rights violations across the country as well as deliberate impoverishment, arbitrary taxation and land confiscation.

Parliament appeals to the Thai Government not to return the Rohingya refugees and asylum seekers, including the boat people, to Burma, where their lives will be in danger or where they may be subject to torture. It welcomes the statement by Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva that the allegations of mistreatment of Rohingya asylum seekers by the military will be investigated. It also welcomes the Thai Government's cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and calls for immediate and full access to all the detained Rohingya boat people in order to define the level of their need for protection.

Stressing that the phenomenon of boat people, which affects Thailand and other countries, is essentially a regional one, Members view positively the efforts of the Thai Government to increase cooperation among regional neighbours to address concerns about the Rohingya people. It appeals to the members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and, in particular, its Thai chair and relevant international organisations, to work on a permanent solution to this long-standing problem.

Member States are asked to strengthen the EU Common Position, which is due for renewal in April 2009, in order to address the appalling discrimination against the Rohingya people. Furthermore, a Parliamentary delegation to Burma is of major importance in the present human rights situation, which continues to show no signs of improvement. Parliament believes that international pressure on the regime should be reinforced.