Special place for children in EU external action

2008/2203(INI) - 19/02/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted, by 544 votes to 59 with 42 abstentions, a resolution on a special place for children in EU external action in response to the Commission Communication on the subject. It welcomed the Communication and recognised that EU institutions have attached increasing importance to children's rights, but underline that much remains to be done to put the political commitments into practice. They stress that none of the plans will be realised unless adequate funding is available.

Parliament notes that every day, more than 26 000 children under the age of 5 die around the world, mostly from preventable causes. On current trends, the MDG goal to reduce child deaths by two thirds will not be reached until 2045. Member States are urged to fulfil their pledges to provide adequate, predictable funding through timetabled budgetary aid designed to meet the 2010 benchmarks.

Members go on to make a series of recommendations, highlighting the need to pursue the elimination of all forms of discrimination against girls, and to pay special attention to the most vulnerable and socially excluded girls and boys, including disabled children, migrant children, children from minorities, separated or unaccompanied children and children without parental care. The EU is urged to prioritise the right to education, especially for girl children, in aid programmes and policy dialogue with partner countries.

The main points are as follows:

- in order to put the child rights-based approach into practice, the EU must undertake a thorough analysis of children's rights, ideally when Country, Regional and Thematic Strategy Papers are adopted or reviewed, on the basis of which actions and programmes targeting children's issues can be selected. The Parliament calls on the Commission to provide to Parliament, as early as possible or during mid-term reviews of development programmes, an overview of child-related actions and financial allocations;
- the Commission is asked to draw up a report examining whether the existing international agreements between the EU and third countries already contain a legally binding clause on the protection of children's rights and, if not, whether such a clause could be inserted into agreements;
- it is also called upon to help partner countries adopt child-friendly budgeting, especially when the EC is providing budget support, and to develop integrated, comprehensive National Action Plans for Children with clear benchmarks, measurable targets, timelines and review and reporting mechanisms on children's rights;
- Parliament insists that the general budget support of the EU should include funds for capacity-building for relevant ministries (such as Ministries of Welfare, Health, Education and Justice) to ensure that they have the appropriate policies and tools to budget and implement services for children;
- the Commission and Member States must support institutional structures in partner countries to protect and promote children's rights, including independent ombudspersons;
- Members welcome the Commission's plan to address education in its humanitarian aid operations and call for sufficient funding and staffing at EU level to implement the new policy commitment;
- the Commission is asked to propose a uniform method for labelling products imported into the EU so as to certify that they have been manufactured without the use of child labour at each stage in the chain of production;
- in order to ensure visibility and leadership on children's rights, an EU Special Representative should be appointed;
- all EU policies with a likely effect on children in third countries should be subject to consistent child rights impact assessments prior to their adoption, as well as subsequent evaluations.

Lastly, Parliament calls for more support to fair trade and labelling initiatives which encourage companies not to use child labour. Compliance with voluntary codes of conduct regarding core labour rights should be better controlled and made transparent to European consumers. Public procurement contracts should be made conditional on compliance with international child labour standards.