

Resolution on religious freedom in Pakistan

2010/2663(RSP) - 20/05/2010 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on religious freedom in Pakistan.

The resolution was tabled on behalf of the EPP, S&D, ALDE, Greens/ALE, ECR and EFD groups.

Whilst welcoming the measures taken in the interest of religious minorities by the Government of Pakistan since November 2008, such as establishing a quota of five per cent for minorities in the federal jobs sector, recognising non-Muslim public holidays and declaring National Minorities Day, Parliament expresses deep concern that the blasphemy laws – which can carry the death sentence in Pakistan and are often used to justify censorship, criminalisation, persecution and, in certain cases, the murder of members of political, racial and religious minorities – are open to a misuse that affects people of all faiths in Pakistan. It recalls that the blasphemy laws, introduced in 1982 and 1986, are misused by extremist groups and those wishing to settle personal scores, and have led to an increase of violence against members of religious minorities, particularly Ahmadis, but also Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Shiites, Buddhists, Parsis, Bahá'ís and critical citizens who dare to raise their voice against injustice. Members note that the vast majority of people accused under the blasphemy laws are Muslim, but accusations against individuals from minority faiths can trigger disproportionate violence against their community as a whole. They also note that it was blasphemy accusations that triggered anti-Christian mob violence in Gojra and Korian in summer 2009, leaving eight dead and at least a hundred houses destroyed. 76 people were charged with blasphemy in 2009 in 25 registered cases, including 17 people charged under Section 295C of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC).

Accordingly, Parliament calls upon the Government of Pakistan to carry out a thoroughgoing review of the blasphemy laws and their current application, as well as – inter alia – of Section 295 C of the Penal Code, which prescribes a mandatory death penalty for anyone found guilty of blasphemy, and in the meantime to implement amendments as suggested by the Federal Minister for Minority Affairs. It calls on the Government to follow through with its 2008 promise to commute all death sentences to prison terms as a first step in the direction of abolishing the death penalty.

Parliament calls on the Council, Commission and Member States, as appropriate to:

- include the rights of minorities in Pakistan in the agenda for the forthcoming summit with a view to initiating early reform of discriminatory blasphemy legislation;
- include the issue of religious tolerance in society in its counter-terrorism dialogue with Pakistan, this matter being of central importance to the long-term fight against religious extremism;
- continue with financial support for human rights organisations and defenders, and to outline practical measures to support the growing civil society movement in Pakistan against the blasphemy laws and other discriminatory legislation;
- request details of tangible progress made in respect of the Government of Pakistan's response to the anti-Christian violence in Gojra and Korian, particularly with regard to bringing the culprits to justice;
- insist that the Government of Pakistan uphold the democracy and human rights clause enshrined in the Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan;
- present a report on the implementation of the Cooperation Agreement and the democracy and human rights clause;
- support the Government of Pakistan in the development of its Ministry for Human Rights and in establishing a meaningful, independent and authoritative National Human Rights Commission.

Members express their particular concern at the ongoing discrimination against and persecution of the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan, and call upon the Government of Pakistan to repeal Section 298 of the Pakistan Penal Code, which severely restricts the daily lives of this group, and to discourage inflammatory events such as the "End of Prophethood" Conferences in Lahore. They also call on the Pakistani government to do the following:

- implement fully the judgment of the Supreme Court of Pakistan whereby they are to ensure registration of all eligible voters in the new electoral rolls, including Ahmadiyya Muslims;
- ratify fully and without reserves the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the 1984 UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- guarantee the human rights of minorities laid down in the Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, notably Article 18 thereof, which provides that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion";
- implement the proposed reforms of the education system and to regulate and inspect Madrasas;
- remove all propaganda promoting hatred, religious superiority and defamation of religion from the textbooks approved by the national curriculum wing of the Ministry of Education;
- facilitate a visit by the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ms Asma Jahangir, to Pakistan.

Lastly, Parliament refers to the resolution on "Combating Defamation of Religions" adopted by a narrow majority in the UN Human Rights Council on 25 March, which is proposed annually by Pakistan on behalf of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). It is concerned about the possible misuse of the "Combating Defamation of Religion" campaign at the UN, stressing the Council conclusions of 16 November 2009. Members note that there is a contradiction between the Government of Pakistan's commitment to freedom of religion and its leading role in the OIC in endorsing the "Combating Defamation of Religion" agenda at the United Nations.