Resolution on Bangladesh: human rights and forthcoming elections

2013/2951(RSP) - 21/11/2013 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 53 votes to 0 with 8 abstentions a resolution on Bangladesh: human rights and forthcoming elections.

The resolution was tabled by the EPP, S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA, and ECR groups.

It expressed its serious concern over the continuing paralysis of everyday life in Bangladesh as a result of general strikes organised by the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami opposition and the confrontation between the two political camps - the Awami League and the opposition - in the run-up to the parliamentary elections to be held before 25 January 2014. It regretted the fact the Bangladeshi parliament did not manage to achieve an all-party consensus for the exercise of power by the government in the pre-election period, bearing in mind that most democracies manage this phase without a caretaker government. It called on the Bangladeshi Government and the opposition to **put Bangladesh's best interests first and to find a compromise** that would give the Bangladeshi people a chance to express their democratic will.

Bearing in mind that so far some 30 Bangladeshis have been killed, and hundreds wounded, in political violence during general strikes ('hartals') called for by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) with its ally, the Jamaat-e-Islami party, Parliament called on all groups and individuals to exercise tolerance and restraint, especially in the leadup to, during, and after the elections. The Bangladesh Election Commission is asked to organise and oversee the next general elections in a fully transparent manner. All parties are asked not to boycott the elections, as this would deprive citizens of a political choice and undermine Bangladesh's social and economic stability and its impressive development progress, notably on the Millennium Development Goals, disaster management, labour rights and the empowerment of women.

The Bangladeshi Government is asked to:

- restore the enabling environment for civil society organisations, including human rights defenders, which has contributed much to Bangladesh's development, so that they can carry out their activities freely;
- carry out prompt, independent and transparent investigations into cases involving violations of the rights of human rights defenders;
- scrap the 30 % 'representativity' requirement for the registration of trade unions, to extend the scope of the Labour Act to cover categories of workers currently excluded, to adopt a prohibition on employers interfering in internal trade union affairs, to extend the scope of the Labour Act to apply to export processing zones, and to grant collective bargaining rights to Workers' Welfare Associations (WWA), while making it easier to register WWAs.

Lastly, Parliament welcomed the joint initiative by the Government of Bangladesh and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in collaboration with government, employers' and workers' representatives, on 'Improving Working Conditions in the Ready-Made Garment Sector'. It urged European and other international clothing brands to **fulfil the promises and pledges made in the aftermath of the Rana Plaza factory collapse**, including under the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh.