Resolution on Zimbabwe

2019/2563(RSP) - 14/02/2019 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on Zimbabwe.

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

Parliament strongly condemned the violence that occurred during the recent protests in Zimbabwe in January this year, noting that more than 17 people have been killed, hundreds injured, and around one thousand people arrested, including children aged between 9 and 16. The protests followed a 150 % increase in fuel prices, and were also in response to rising poverty, the poor state of the economy, and declining living standards. The outcome of the first presidential and parliamentary elections held in the country on July 2018 had also resulted in an outbreak of post electoral violence that left six people dead and many injured during protests called by the opposition. Members noted that international observers, including the EU, condemned the violence and the excessive use of force by the army and internal security forces. The final report of the EU Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) stated that the figures presented by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), which declared Emmerson Mnangagwa winner with 50.8 % of votes, contained many anomalies and inaccuracies and raised enough questions to lead to doubts as to the accuracy and reliability of the numbers presented.

Human rights and excessive use of force

Members urged the Government of Zimbabwe to release all political prisoners and withdraw urgently all military personnel and the youth militia deployed across the country that are terrorising residents, and to put an immediate end to abuses by security forces and to promptly and impartially investigate all allegations of excessive use of force by police and state officials. They pointed to the fact that the police have continuously misused existing laws, such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), to justify the curb on opposition members and human rights activists, and to ban lawful and peaceful demonstrations. Furthermore, evidence shows that the army has been largely responsible for the acts of murder, rape and armed robbery. Parliament called on the Zimbabwean authorities to undertake a prompt, thorough, impartial and independent investigation into allegations of human rights violations and abuses, including rape and sexual violence by security forces, and to bring those responsible to justice. It added that it was deeply concerned about reported violations of due process through fast-tracking and mass trials.

Review of restricted measures

Members called on the European Council to review its restrictive measures against individuals and entities in Zimbabwe, including those measures currently suspended, in the light of accountability for recent state violence, and referred to Council Decision (CFSP) 2017/288 amending Decision 2011/101/CFSP concerning restrictive measures against Zimbabwe.

Cotonou Agreement

Parliament reminded the Government of Zimbabwe that the support of the European Union and its Member States in the context of the Cotonou Agreement, and for trade, development, and economic assistance, is conditional on its respecting the rule of law and the international conventions and treaties to which it is party, including the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. It recalled that long-term support hinges on comprehensive reforms rather than mere promises and called on the EU to step up its political dialogue with Zimbabwe on human rights on the basis of Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement.

Recommendations of EU EOM

Parliament called on the government to fully implement the recommendations made by the EU EOM, especially with regard to the rule of law and an inclusive political environment, which are set out in the letter of 10 October 2018 from the Chief Observer to President Mnangagwa. These include (i) creating a level playing field for all political parties; (ii) strengthening ZEC by making it truly independent and transparent, thereby restoring confidence in the electoral process; (iii) ensuring that strengthening ZEC's independence makes it free from governmental oversight in the approval of its regulations; and (iv) creating a more inclusive electoral process;

Internet shutdown

The resolution condemned the internet shutdown that allowed the authorities to conceal the human rights abuses committed by the army and internal security forces and to obstruct independent reporting and documentation of abuses during the crackdown and immediately after the election. It pointed out that the Zimbabwe High Court declared that the use of the Interception of Communications Act to suspend online communications was illegal, noting that the interruption of telecommunications has become a tool used by the regime to block the coordination of demonstrations organised on social networks, and to prevent access to information in order to mask the massive human rights violations which the state was preparing to commit.

Lastly, Parliament called on the EU delegation and EU Member State embassies in Zimbabwe to continue their close monitoring of developments in the country and to use all appropriate tools to support human rights defenders, civil society organisations and trade unions, to promote the essential elements of the Cotonou Agreement and to support pro-democracy movements.