Resolution on forced labour and the situation of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

2020/2913(RSP) - 17/12/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 604 votes to 20, with 57 abstentions, a resolution on forced labour and the situation of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

The text adopted in plenary had been tabled as a joint resolution by the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA and ECR groups.

Condemnation of forced labour and exploitation of Uyghur minorities

Parliament strongly condemned the government-led system of forced labour, particularly the exploitation of Uyghur, Kazakh and Kyrgyz minorities and other Muslim groups in factories both within and outside internment camps in Xinjiang. It also condemned the transfer of forced labourers to other Chinese administrative divisions and the fact that well-known European brands and companies benefit from this labour.

Members are also concerned about the increasingly oppressive regime faced by many religious and ethnic minorities, particularly Uyghurs and Kazakhs, which undermines their human dignity and violates their freedom of cultural expression, religious belief, their right to freedom of speech and expression, and their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Deploring the persecution and serious and systematic human rights violations that amount to crimes against humanity, Parliament called on the Chinese government:

- to put an immediate end to the arbitrary practice of detention without charge, trial and criminal conviction of Uighurs and members of other Muslim minorities,

- to close all camps and detention centres and to release detainees without delay and without conditions;

- to cease government-sponsored forced labour and mass sterilisation.

The EU is called upon to work proactively for the opening of an independent UN inquiry into China to ensure accountability for the crimes committed.

Concerned about reports that Uyghurs living abroad are being harassed by the Chinese authorities, Members called on the Commission and all Member States to ensure the protection of members of the Xinjiang diaspora, to expediate asylum applications by Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims and to open dialogue with states from which Uyghurs are at risk of being deported to China.

Members also called on the Chinese authorities to grant journalists and international observers as well as EU officials meaningful and unimpeded access to Xinjiang province and unrestricted access to the internment camps.

Surveillance technologies

Parliament strongly condemned the widespread use of digital surveillance technology to monitor and control the population of Xinjiang, and the recently discovered trials of facial recognition software capable of setting off specific alarms for use by the authorities when members of the Uyghur minority are identified.

Deeply concerned that China is already exporting such technology to authoritarian states around the world, Members called on the EU and Member States to monitor the acquisition and development of such technology, and to refrain from allowing their suppliers access to national and European public funding and procurement markets.

Holistic EU strategy

Parliament called on the Commission to develop and implement a holistic EU strategy to ensure genuine progress on human rights in China and to implement the package of measures agreed in July, including the 'lifeboat scheme' programme for oppressed people in China.

The Chinese authorities were urged to continue implementing the national reforms required for ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, signed in 1998, and to implement the recommendations of UN human rights bodies.

Parliament reiterated its support for the forthcoming EU-US Dialogue on China and urged that human rights should feature prominently on its agenda.