Annual report on human rights in the world in 2001 and European Union's policy

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The committee adopted the report by Johan van HECKE (EPP-ED, B) on human rights in the world in 2001 and EU human rights policy. The report focused, among other things, on modern forms of slavery and terrorism. Stressing that all forms of forced labour represented a violation of human rights, the committee called on the Commission and Member States to draw up a list of products manufactured using child labour or forced labour, indicating the country of origin, and to adopt a joint approach within the WTO and the ILO on ways of combating this problem. The committee also expressed the view that the sexual exploitation of children was a criminal act which should be prosecuted and called on the EU Member States to extend the jurisdiction of their penal codes outside their territory to protect children against sexual abuse. While acknowledging that the events of 11 September 2001 had revealed new types of terrorism with no concern for innocent human lives lost on a massive scale, the report stressed that the fight against terrorism must not in itself lead to breaches of human rights. In this connection the legal status of the prisoners captured during the Afghanistan war and detained at Guantanamo Bay should be clarified. The committee said that the military decree issued by President Bush, authorising a military commission to judge these prisoners in secret, was a contravention of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the USA is a signatory. It backed the call by Javier SOLANA for the Guantanamo Bay detainees to be granted prisoner-of-war status, and said that any dispute as to their status should be decided by a competent tribunal in accordance with the Geneva Convention. The committee also wanted state terrorism to be included in the definition of terrorism. The report further stressed that the EU's overall strategy in the area of human rights needed to be coherent and consistent. It pointed out that Parliament's main role was to hold the Council and the Commission accountable for the implementation of the EU's human rights policies. The Council should give full consideration to Parliament's priorities and report back to it to a greater extent, including giving written replies to issues raised by Parliament in its annual reports. The committee urged that human rights be placed high on the agendas of Parliament's relevant committees and delegations and also that an 'ambassador' for human rights be appointed to represent the EP vis-à-vis other EU institutions and international organisations. Other points raised in the report included concern at the decrease in funding for the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), to which Parliament attached high priority, and condemnation of the use of stoning under Sharia law and all forms of degrading and cruel punishment. Iran, some states of Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and Sudan were all singled out in this connection. Lastly, the committee called on all states to introduce a moratorium on executions with a view to completely abolishing the death penalty and reiterated an appeal to various countries (USA, China, Saudi Arabia, Congo, Iran and others) to end all executions immediately.