Annual report on the human rights in the world in 2003 and the Union's policy on this matter

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By 189 votes for to 111 against with 29 abstentions, Parliament adopted its annual report on human rights in the world in 2003. Drawn up by Véronique DE KEYSER (PES, B), the report aims to draw attention to the hidden costs of instability in the world, affecting more than just the direct victims of conflict. The report condemns in particular the denial of human rights often faced by disabled people. It also makes recommendations for a strengthening of EU human rights policy. Furthermore, it stresses the right for everyone to have access to public health provision, including the fight against AIDS, opposition to sexual violence and reproductive health care as a fundamental right.

Parliament expresses its satisfaction that the fifth parliamentary term has seen a number of major innovations in relation to EU policy on human rights, including the creation or further development of important instruments, that correspond largely to its own initiatives. It considers that terrorism is one of the most serious common challenges facing the international community. It condemns all acts of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable, irrespective of their motivation, forms and manifestations and underlines that the fight against terrorism has to remain a matter of the highest priority for the EU. Moreover, Parliament manifests its commitment to continuing to act in support of respect for human rights and promotion of democracy worldwide, and to pursuing in particular its initiatives in favour of the abolition of the death penalty and torture, the fight against impunity, the elimination of racism, xenophobia and discrimination, the protection of women's rights and children's rights (including child soldiers and child labour).

Parliament welcomes the creation of the Commission's website on human rights which includes analyses, reports and research done on key issues and which allows even better information to NGOs and civil society as a whole. It decides to retain closer contacts with former winners of the Sakharov Prize and stresses, in particular, the need to continue and increase support for former Sakharov Prize winners who are still suffering from repression in their country, in particular Leyla Zana, Aung San Suu Kyi and Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas.

The house is convinced that the new European security strategy provides an important conceptual framework in relation to armed conflict and conflict resolution and insists that a proper human rights dimension has to be developed, based on a concept of prevention. On the other hand, it regrets that Parliament's demands for a serious and non-selective application of human rights clauses appear to have had no visible effect on the human rights policies of the Council, the EU Member States and the Commission.

The Commission is called upon to report back to Parliament on the state of preparation of an implementation mechanism for the human rights clause in order to maintain explicit pressure for significant improvements of the human rights situation in the countries concerned and to encourage sections of society that are in favour of promoting democracy and respect for human rights.

Grave concern is expressed at the continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has led to a seemingly endless spiral of hatred and violence and to increased suffering for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Parliament repeats its call for periodic review of sanctions policies in order to assess and enhance their effectiveness. MEPs welcome the EU's support for the creation of the International Criminal Court and

ask the Council and Commission to uses the political influence of the EU to encourage as many countries as possible to sign the Rome statute of the ICC.

Parliament welcomes the action taken by ECHO in the field of humanitarian aid, which often has a component of reproductive health, and urges it to pay even greater attention to the dramatic situation caused by the lack of access to all aspects of reproductive health in emergency situations and in refugee camps. It insists that the Council and the Member States have to address even more firmly the magnitude of HIV/AIDS, which represents a major threat to global security, with 3 million people dying yearly despite the possibility of treatment; underlines that the fight against HIV/AIDS must include effective public health programmes involving education, prevention, treatment, care and support.

The Council is called upon to act upon its stated intention to step up funding for the Global Fund, specifically for programmes in the field of reproductive health as well as funding of NGOs under all assistance programmes (TACIS, PHARE, MEDA, CARDS, etc.) via not only health projects, but also projects dedicated to drug problems and general educational and awareness-raising projects. For its part, the Commission is asked to step up its reproductive health programmes in the TACIS area as the situation is increasingly worrying and the countries concerned do not have the means to meet educational and supply needs, which results in a sharp increase of HIV/AIDS transmission (1.2 million people living with HIV/AIDS in Eastern Europe/Central Asia), an extremely high rate of abortions (3.6 abortions per lifetime per woman), poor-quality contraceptive methods and a high infant mortality rate (up to 74 per 1000 compared to 5 per 1000 in France).

A significant section of the report is devoted to the protection of the fundamental rights of disabled people. Parliament stresses that disabled people exercising their right to mobility must not suffer any form of direct or indirect discrimination, whether deliberate or not, or financial discrimination, and regrets that public transport (buses, coaches, taxis, underground trains, trams, and transport by rail, air, river and sea) are still hard for disabled people (and their guide dogs) to access and use.

Regarding reproductive health, MEPs ask the European Community Humanitarian Office to make greater efforts to tackle the "dramatic situation caused by the lack of access to all aspects of reproductive health in emergency situations and in refugee camps." They ask the Commission to reinforce its funding of education programmes relating to reproductive health, with a focus, amongst others, on the fight against sexual violence and female genital cutting or mutilation.

Lastly, in an amendment to the report, Parliament regrets that people arrested in Egypt on grounds of their sexual orientation are all too often denied certain aspects of their fundamental human rights, including the right to a fair trial.