Annual report on the human rights in the world in 2004 and the European Union's policy on this matter

2004/2151(INI) - 28/04/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Simon COVENEY (EPP-ED, IE) on human rights in the world and the EU's foreign policy in this regard. (Please refer to the summary of 30/03/2005.) The resolution examines the human rights situation in 2004 in many countries, ranging from the candidate states and the Western Balkans to the Middle East, Russia, Asia, Africa and the Americas. Human rights are also examined through different themes including the fight against terrorism, international trade, the impact of conflicts on women and children and the International Criminal Court.

The principal points of the resolution with regard to geographical areas are as follows:

The EU's Neighbourhood and Middle East: Parliament called on Belarus to grant civil and political rights to all citizens. The authorities in Belarus must immediately stop the execution of political opponents and arbitrary arrests and detentions. Parliament stated its support for the work of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, which has been awarded the 2004 Sakharov Prize.

On Morocco, Parliament welcomed the efforts to address the plight of victims of past human rights abuses, particularly the establishment of the Equity and Reconciliation Committee. It noted with concern, however, the reports of violations of human rights in Western Sahara including in the area of freedom of speech and free movement. It encouraged Morocco and the Polisario Front to move forward on the basis of the internationally recognised Baker Plan, and to release all the prisoners of war.

Moving on, Parliament recognised the right of Israel to take measures to provide security for Israelis, and reminded the latter that any counter-terrorism measures taken cannot ignore human rights considerations. Parliament expressed concern at the existence and scale of a security fence/separation barrier in large parts of the West Bank and its implications for the human rights of local populations. It asked Israel to cease further construction of the fence/separation barrier, and noted the ruling of the International Court of Justice in relation to this matter, as well as the ruling of the Israeli High Court of Justice (June 2004) and the Israeli government decision of February 2005.

Parliament went on to recognises the difficulties faced by the new authorities in Iraq in their efforts to establish law and order with the help of the military forces stationed there and expressed its concern regarding the present situation. It commended the determination and courage shown by the Iraqi people during the recent election campaign and vote, which offered them and their country the prospect of a better democratic future.

On Iran, Parliament stated that it was very concerned that the human rights situation has deteriorated in the last two years and called on the Iranian authorities to make a serious commitment to reversing this trend. It condemned the increasing number of reports of public executions, and floggings and urged the Iranian Parliament to introduce legislation banning stoning without exception.

Asia: Whilst welcoming the recent positive dialogue between Pakistan and India on Kashmir, Parliament remained concerned at reports of human rights abuses in the Kashmir region by members of the Indian military and police forces. The Indian government should ensure that all reports of such abuses are

investigated promptly by a judicial authority; Parliament strongly condemned all acts of terrorism and violence throughout the region and noted the responsibility of Pakistan to make forceful efforts to aid the curbing of such activities. There must be full and open access for media and human rights organisations to the Kashmir region.

Parliament moved on to welcome the fact that China is engaging with the EU in the human rights dialogue. The Member State governments, the Commission and China must use this dialogue as a real opportunity to bring about changes in the internal policies of China, where major human rights concerns continue to exist, in particular concerning the use of the death penalty and the suppression of freedom of association and religion. An increasingly positive trade relationship must be contingent on human rights reforms. Parliament was concerned at the recent reversal of EU policy by the Council in relation to the embargo on arms sales to China and strongly recommended that the arms embargo remain intact until greater progress is made on human rights issues.

Africa: Parliament called on the EU to impose targeted sanctions on the government of Sudan until such time as there is verifiable evidence showing an end to the policy of ethnic cleansing and mass murder of its citizens. It welcomes the decision of the UN Security Council to refer the Darfur situation to the ICC so as to ensure justice for the victims and an end to the climate of impunity which reigns, and to prevent the perpetration of further abuses. It deplored, however, the fact that this Security Council resolution stipulates that nationals of States that are not parties to the ICC Statute who are suspected of having committed international crimes in Darfur should be exclusively prosecuted before their own domestic courts.

Parliament also condemned in the strongest terms the actions of the government of Zimbabwe and criticised its policies, which promote racial division and economic mismanagement. Such policies are leading the country into the depths of disaster. There has been a substantial drop in food production in recent times and Parliament discussed the difficulties that NGOs are experiencing in accessing those in need of aid. The government must cease the oppression of political opposition, guarantee freedom of the media and ensure that elections are held on a free and fair basis in the presence of reputable international observers.

The Americas: Parliament called on the government of Cuba to accept the right of free assembly and free speech and to immediately restore the unofficial moratorium on the death penalty. It condemned the death penalty imposed on three hijackers and the imprisonment of political opponents, and asked for their immediate release; Parliament called on the Cuban authorities to allow Sakharov Prize winner Oswaldo Payá to accept the invitation of the European Parliament. It also condemned the sudden change of strategy and lifting of sanctions by the Council in respect of Cuba.

Parliament went on to condemn the US Government for the treatment to which prisoners have been subjected in Guantánamo. The US government must ensure that all its prisoners, including those held in Guantánamo detention camp, are granted minimum human rights in accordance with international human rights law and fair trial procedures. The US must also immediately clarify the situation of the prisoners in Guantánamo and in other locations in respect of international human rights standards and humanitarian law. Parliament repeated its positions on the dramatic situation of the prisoners in Guantánamo, as reiterated in several of its resolutions. Finally, it called on the US to submit a report to the UN Human Rights Committee on its compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The thematic issues are summarized in the document dated 30/03/2005.