Report on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2005 and the European Union's policy on the matter

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Richard HOWITT (PES, UK) in response to the EU Council's Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2005 and the EU's policy on the matter. The committee began by pointing out that the most recent enlargement of the EU to 25 Member States had increased its global importance and hence given it greater weight in international human rights politics.

The report singled out areas where the Council's activity was deserving of praise: these included the UK Presidency's efforts to combat the death penalty and promote freedom of expression, and the Austrian Presidency's promise to "continue the practice of demarches in respect of all of the EU's international partners regarding the ratification of international conventions banning the use of torture."

MEPs in the committee welcomed the inclusion of human rights issues in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), and commended the "increasing effectiveness of EU electoral observation activities." They praised the Council for imposing sanctions on Uzbekistan last year, and reiterated their condemnation of the violent repression in Ethiopia and human rights abuses in Tunisia. The committee was concerned at the "deteriorating security situation in Darfur", "continuing reports of a long list of human rights abuses" in China, the "extrajudicial killings, disappearances and torture in custody in Chechnya," and "Iran's poor human rights record." There was also anxiety about human rights abuses in Iraq, but a welcome for EU support for the new government there. The committee asked Council and Commission to "call upon the US government immediately to close the Guantanamo detention centre" and give the prisoners held there a fair trial. It warned that "there is a general failure by the European Union to systematically and continuously address human rights concerns" and that "EU activities in the UN with respect to human rights are too introverted."

MEPs wanted to see a much more significant proportion of European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights funding devoted to grassroots projects. They also called for a "clear system of sanctions" to be applied to countries that violate the human rights clause in agreements with the Union. In future annual reports, the committee wanted to see a list of "Countries of Particular Concern" according to the EU's Human Rights Guidelines. It added that the reports should explicitly address discrimination issues based on ethnicity, religion, gender, disability and sexual orientation. Finally, it said that Parliament should be more directly involved in the drafting of the reports, to make the document "representative of the views of the Council, the Commission and the Parliament."