Annual report on human rights in the world 2006 and the EU's policy on this matter

2007/2020(INI) - 26/04/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report by Simon **COVENEY** (EPP-ED, IE) on the EU's 2006 Annual Report on Human Rights. It singled out a number of countries for particular criticism, including China, Iran, Russia and Sudan. The EU and its institutions did not escape criticism. The resolution sets out to examine, evaluate and, in specific cases, offer constructive criticism of the human rights activities of the Commission and the Council and of the overall activities of Parliament, in particular by drawing attention to issues neglected in those activities.

In its opening remarks, Parliament considered that greater priority needed to be given to improving the ability of the EU to respond to human rights breaches by third countries, not least by mainstreaming human rights policy with respect to EU policies vis-à-vis such countries, including the external impact of EU internal policies. It emphasised the need for a consistent policy implemented by all EU Member States in their bilateral relations with third countries where human rights are frequently violated and asked Member States to conduct their bilateral contacts with those countries in a manner consistent with EU policy.

With regard to the **EU Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2006,** Parliament felt that it was a positive development that the report endeavoured to do justice to the activities of the European Parliament, but asked again that future Presidencies report in the EU Annual Reports on the ways in which Parliament's resolutions - including urgency resolutions on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law - have been taken into account by the Council and the Commission. It also asked the Council and the Commission to analyse the ways in which human rights are dealt with in other EU policies, such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and the policies on development and trade and immigration. Parliament advocated, too the adoption of an overall list of "countries of particular concern" with respect to human rights violations in the context of their Annual Report each year.

Parliament regretted that the new **UNHRC** has proven to be ineffectual in responding appropriately to human rights crises around the world due to the use of the UNHRC by many states as a forum for political pressure instead of the promotion of human rights. It also expressed its disappointment at the weakness of the UNHRC resolution on Darfur, deploring the fact that the UNHRC delegation was prevented from entering Sudan by not being granted visas by the authorities. Parliament also expressed its concern at the effect on the ordinary Palestinian people of the EU decision to suspend the provision of aid through the Palestinian Authority, as a result of the failure of the Authority to fulfil legitimate conditions.

It asked the Council to explain how it was possible for Belarus to be elected onto the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in June 2005 when four major EU countries are permanent members of that Governing Body, and whether the Council considered opposing Belarus' membership.

The Council and the Commission were asked to use all available mechanisms to encourage the US to sign the Rome Statute and also to express strong disapproval of US efforts actively to prevent other countries from ratifying the Statute and from proposing to third countries parallel agreements such as bilateral exemption treaties.

The Commission must ensure that its staff, in particular those working in the field of development policy, are sufficiently aware of the **human rights guidelines**. Parliament commended the German Presidency's commitment to establish EU human rights guidelines on the rights of the child. In addition, full implementation of the 2004 EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders must be prioritised.

Parliament emphasised the need to strengthen the **EU-China human rights dialogue** considerably. It stressed that China's human rights record remained a matter of serious concern. Despite significant economic reforms, political and human rights concerns still persist regarding such matters as political imprisonment, forced labour, freedom of expression and religion, rights of religious and ethnic minorities, the Laogai camp system and allegations of organ harvesting. Such concerns should receive more focus in the build-up to the Beijing Olympic games. Parliament urged the EU to ensure that its trading relationship with China is contingent upon human rights reforms. The Council and the Commission must raise the issue of **Tibet** and actively support the strengthening of the dialogue between the Chinese Government and the Dalai Lama. Parliament was very concerned about the deterioration of the human rights situation in **Iran**, and about the fact that the human rights dialogue with Iran had been interrupted since 2004 due to a lack of cooperation from Iran. The Commission was asked to implement all actions required within the framework of the EIDHR, so as to promote contacts with Iranian civil society and to further support democracy and human rights.

With regard to **Russia**, Parliament regretted that the EU had had only limited success in bringing about policy change as a result of raising difficult issues. These include the situation in Chechnya, impunity and the independence of the judiciary, the treatment of human rights defenders, the independence of the media and freedom of expression, and the treatment of ethnic minorities. It repeated concerns about Russian legislation limiting the activities of NGOs, and remained appalled at the murder of Anna Politkovskaja, and referred to the allegations that the Russian government was behind the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko, who died in November 2006 in London.

It moved on to express concern about the limited progress achieved to date and the need for greater focus on human rights issues in **Turkey,** especially as regards freedom of religion for all religious communities and full enjoyment of their property rights, protection of minorities, freedom of expression and human rights concerns relating to the population of Kurdish origin in the south-east of the country.

Parliament made recommendations with regard to the situation in **Burma/Myanmur**, and urged the Commission to review its policy tools vis-à-vis Libya. On Iraq, Parliament noted with total stupefaction the provisional suspension by ECHO of humanitarian aid for **Iraq,** notwithstanding the disastrous situation afflicting the suffering Iraqi people and Iraqi refugees. However, it welcomed the resumption of this aid from February 2007.

It was deplorable that the violence in **Darfur** has continued unchecked, and that the Sudanese government has not been held accountable for its repeated failures to comply with international demands and protect its citizens from violence. While welcoming the recent indictments issued by the ICC, Parliament regretted that the EU had not taken more unilateral action regarding the crisis in Darfur and had not tried harder to persuade the government of Sudan to accept an international peacekeeping force. The Council was urged to agree a plan of specific, targeted sanctions to be imposed on the Khartoum regime, in accordance with a clear timetable, in the event of non-compliance with the demands of the international community. The EU should contribute (and to put pressure on others to also contribute) to an international peacekeeping force and the enforcement of the no-fly zone over Darfur, and ensure that the African Union is adequately resourced and assisted to fulfil its mandate. Parliament implored the Member States, the Council and the Commission to assume their responsibilities and to provide effective protection for the people of Darfur from a humanitarian disaster.

With regard to the implementation of human rights and democracy clauses in external agreements, Parliament was concerned by the recent Commission proposal to exempt India from the rule that all EU agreements must include a human rights and democracy clause, in the context of the negotiations for the EU-India Free Trade Agreement. Such a move would be a retrograde step and could set a worrying precedent for future negotiations on trade agreements.

Parliament moved to point out that numerous internal policies, particularly those relating to asylum, immigration and anti-terrorist measures, were having a major impact on respect for human rights in third countries. Greater efforts must be made to ensure that the internal policies in question comply with human rights and international humanitarian law. There was particular disquiet at the fact that agreements for the readmission of illegal immigrants were being concluded with third countries that did not have the legal and institutional machinery needed in order to handle the readmission of nationals and protect their rights. Any migration policy has to be a common policy and, above all, preventive rather than punitive.

Lastly, Parliament examined its own effectiveness in its interventions in human rights cases. It made numerous recommendations with regard to mainstreaming and to the work of its committees, and welcomed the contribution it had made to raising the profile of Guantánamo and its human rights concerns relating to it. The very existence of the Guantánamo Bay detention centre continues to send out a negative signal as to how the fight against terrorism is being pursued.