Thursday, October 10, 2013

46. Resolves to examine the extent to which amendments to the Rules of Procedure would be appropriate for the implementation of the above formal requirements concerning fact-finding visits and plenary resolutions under Article 202 of its Rules of Procedure;

47. Instructs its President to forward this resolution and the report of the Committee on Petitions to the Council, the Commission and the European Ombudsman, and to the governments and parliaments of the Member States, their committees on petitions and their ombudsmen or similar competent bodies.

P7_TA(2013)0422

Recent cases of violence and persecution against Christians, notably in Maaloula (Syria) and Peshawar (Pakistan) and the case of Pastor Saeed Abedini (Iran)

European Parliament resolution of 10 October 2013 on recent cases of violence and persecution against Christians, notably in Maaloula (Syria) and Peshawar (Pakistan) and the case of Pastor Saeed Abedini (Iran) (2013/2872(RSP))

(2016/C 181/15)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to its resolutions of 15 November 2007 on serious events which compromise Christian communities' existence and those of other religious communities ([1]), of 21 January 2010 on recent attacks on Christian communities ([2]), of 6 May 2010 on the mass atrocities in Jos, Nigeria ([3]), of 20 May 2010 on religious freedom in Pakistan ([4]), of 25 November 2010 on Iraq: the death penalty (notably the case of Tariq Aziz) and attacks against Christian communities ([5]), of 20 January 2011 on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion ([6]), of 27 October 2011 on the situation in Egypt and Syria, in particular of Christian communities ([7]), and of 13 December 2012 on the annual report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2011 and the European Union's policy on the matter ([8]),

— having regard to its recommendation to the Council of 13 June 2013 on the draft EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief ([9]),

— having regard to the EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief,

— having regard to the statement of 23 September 2013 by Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, condemning the attack on the Christian community in Peshawar, Pakistan,

— having regard to the Council conclusions of 21 February 2011 on intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion or belief, as well as the Council conclusions of 16 November 2009 underlining the strategic importance of freedom of religion or belief and of countering religious intolerance,

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([1]) OJ C 282 E, 6.11.2008, p. 474.
([2]) OJ C 305 E, 11.11.2010, p. 7.
([3]) OJ C 81 E, 15.3.2011, p. 143.
([4]) OJ C 161 E, 31.5.2011, p. 147.
([5]) OJ C 99 E, 3.4.2012, p. 115.
([6]) OJ C 136 E, 11.5.2012, p. 53.
([7]) OJ C 131 E, 8.5.2013, p. 108.
([8]) Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0503.
([9]) Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0279.

— having regard to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,

— having regard to Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966,

— having regard to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion and Belief of 1981,

— having regard to the reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief,

— having regard to Rules 122(5) and 110(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas the European Union has repeatedly expressed its commitment to freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and freedom of thought, and has stressed that governments have a duty to guarantee these freedoms throughout the world; whereas political and religious leaders have a duty at all levels to combat extremism and promote mutual respect among individuals and religious groups; whereas the development of human rights, democracy and civil liberties is the common base on which the European Union builds its relations with third countries and has been provided for by the democracy clause in the agreements between the EU and third countries;

B. whereas, according to international human rights law and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in particular, everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; whereas this right includes freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching; whereas, according to the UN Human Rights Committee, the freedom of religion or belief protects all beliefs, including theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs;

C. whereas several UNHRC resolutions call on 'all States, within their national legal framework, in conformity with international human rights instruments, to take all appropriate measures to combat hatred, discrimination, intolerance and acts of violence, intimidation and coercion motivated by religious intolerance, including attacks on religious places, and to encourage understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to freedom of belief or religion';

D. whereas according to various reports, government repression and social hostility against individuals and groups from various religious or belief backgrounds are on the increase, in particular in Pakistan, Arab Spring countries and parts of Africa; whereas in some cases the situation facing Christian communities is such as to endanger their future existence and, if they were to disappear, this would entail the loss of a significant part of the religious heritage of the countries concerned;

Maaloula, Syria

E. whereas on 4 September 2013, militants from Jabhat al-Nusra, a group with ties to al-Qaeda, launched an assault on the Syrian village of Maaloula;

F. whereas Maaloula is a symbol of Christian presence in Syria and has been home to different religious communities who have lived in peaceful coexistence for centuries; whereas every September Syrians of all religions have participated in the Day of the Cross festival in this town; whereas Maaloula is one of the three towns and villages in the country where Aramaic is still spoken by the local population;

G. whereas the violent clashes in Maaloula are the first attacks specifically targeting a notable Christian community since the beginning of the violent crisis in Syria; whereas at least four people — Michael Thaalab, Antoine Thaalab, Sarkis Zakem and Zaki Jabra — were killed in these clashes while others — Shadi Thaalab, Jihad Thaalab, Moussa Shannis, Ghassan Shannis, Daoud Milaneh and Atef Kalloumeh — were kidnapped or disappeared; whereas since fighting began in the town, most of its 5 000 residents have fled to neighbouring villages or to Damascus; whereas events in Maaloula are evidence of the further sectarianisation of the Syrian conflict;

H. whereas the Convent of St Tekla (Mar Takla) has historically been home to nuns and to orphans of both the Christian and Muslim religions; whereas around 40 nuns and orphans have stayed in Maaloula despite the intense fighting and are trapped in the convent under deteriorating conditions due to the lack of water and other supplies;

Peshawar, Pakistan

I. whereas on 22 September 2013, in a double suicide bomb attack on the All Saints Church in Kohati Gate, a suburb of Peshawar, at least 82 people were killed and over 120 injured;

J. whereas the Islamist group Jundullah with links to Tehrik-i-Talibaan Pakistan claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it would continue with attacks on Christians and non-Muslims because they are enemies of Islam and would not stop until US drone attacks in Pakistan cease; whereas Tehrik-i-Talibaan Pakistan denied any involvement in the blast and having any links with Jundullah;

K. whereas Pakistan's Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, condemned the attack, saying that targeting innocent people is against the teachings of Islam;

L. whereas Christians, who represent about 1,6 % of the population in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, suffer from prejudice and sporadic bouts of mob violence;

M. whereas the majority of Pakistani Christians lead a precarious existence, often fearful of allegations of blasphemy, a subject which can provoke outbursts of public violence;

N. whereas on 9 March 2013, Muslims in Lahore torched more than 150 Christian homes and two churches in response to an allegation of blasphemy;

O. whereas Pakistan's blasphemy laws make it dangerous for religious minorities to express themselves freely or engage openly in religious activities;

The case of Pastor Saeed Abedini, Iran

P. whereas Saeed Abedini, an Iranian-American pastor imprisoned in Iran since 26 September 2012, was sentenced on 27 January 2013 by a revolutionary court in Iran to an eight-year prison term on charges of disturbing national security by creating a network of Christian churches in private homes; whereas it is reported that Saeed Abedini has suffered physical and psychological abuse in prison;

Q. whereas the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran asserts that Christians should not face sanctions for manifesting and practising their faith, and therefore remains concerned that Christians are reportedly being arrested and prosecuted on the grounds of vaguely worded national security crimes for exercising their beliefs;

1. Strongly condemns the recent attacks against Christians and expresses its solidarity with the families of the victims; expresses once again its deep concerns about the proliferation of episodes of intolerance, repression and violent events directed against Christian communities, particularly in the countries of Africa, Asia and the Middle East; urges the governments concerned to ensure that the perpetrators of these crimes and all persons responsible for the attacks, as well as for other violent acts against Christians or other religious minorities, are brought to justice and tried by due process;

2. Strongly condemns all forms of discrimination and intolerance based on religion and belief, and acts of violence against all religious communities; stresses once again that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right;

3. Reiterates its concern about the exodus of Christians from various countries, especially Middle Eastern countries, in recent years;

Maaloula, Syria

4. Is worried about the current situation facing Christians in Syria; condemns the actions of Jabhat al-Nusra and associated militants in Maaloula and the surrounding area; notes that until now Christians and Muslims used to coexist peacefully in this village, even during the conflict, and agreed that the town must remain a place of peace; recognises that the attack on Maaloula is only one aspect of the Syrian civil war;

5. Emphasises that the monasteries of Maaloula have to be protected in order to preserve life, religious activities and architectural treasures, and to allow Christians and Muslims to live peacefully together;

6. Calls for immediate support and humanitarian assistance to the nuns and orphans trapped in the Convent of St Tekla (Mar Takla); calls on all sides involved in the conflict to allow access to the convent to humanitarian groups;

7. Is concerned about the consequences of these attacks and the possible risks to the Christian community; is aware that Christian and other communities are being caught in the crossfire and are being forced to take sides in a war that continues to sectarianise;

8. Stresses that all actors have a duty to protect all the different minorities present in Syria, including Shias, Alawites, Kurds, Druzes and Christians;

Peshawar, Pakistan

9. Strongly condemns the attack on the All Saints Church in Peshawar and the other recent terrorist attacks;

10. Welcomes the widespread condemnation of the attacks by political players and sections of Pakistan's civil society;

11. Urges the Government of Pakistan to do everything in its power to bring the perpetrators of the attack on the All Saints Church in Peshawar to justice; calls for stronger action to ensure the protection of all Pakistani citizens — regardless of their religion or belief — and to bring to justice all groups and individuals responsible for inciting and carrying out acts of terror;

12. Calls on the Government of Pakistan to take action to protect victims of religiously motivated mob violence, to actively address religious hostility by societal actors, to combat religious intolerance, acts of violence and intimidation, and to act against the perception of impunity;

13. Is deeply worried about the growing danger for Christians in Pakistan, given the recent rise in attacks on this minority, such as the persecution of hundreds of Christians by Islamic zealots in March in Lahore over allegations of blasphemy against Islam;

14. Is deeply concerned about the general situation facing religious minorities in Pakistan, and especially the Christian churches, which have received threats from the Taliban and other extremist groups;

15. Expresses its deep concern that the controversial blasphemy laws are open to misuse that can affect people of all faiths in Pakistan; expresses its particular concern that use of the blasphemy laws, which were publicly opposed by the late Minister Shahbaz Bhattiand and by the late Governor Salman Taseer, is currently on the rise to target Christians in Pakistan;

16. Calls on the Government of Pakistan to carry out a thorough review of the blasphemy laws and their current application, in particular Sections 295 B and C of the Penal Code, which prescribe mandatory life sentences (295 B and C) or even the death penalty (295 C) for alleged acts of blasphemy;

17. Recalls that freedom of religion and minority rights are guaranteed by Pakistan's constitution; encourages all Pakistanis to work together to promote and ensure tolerance and mutual understanding;

18. Welcomes the measures taken in the interest of religious minorities by the Government of Pakistan since November 2008, such as establishing a five per cent quota for minorities in the federal job sector, recognising non-Muslim public holidays and declaring a National Minorities Day;

The case of Pastor Saeed Abedini, Iran

19. Is deeply concerned about the fate of Pastor Saeed Abedini, who has been detained for over a year and was sentenced to eight years of prison in Iran on charges related to his religious beliefs;

20. Calls on the Government of Iran to exonerate and immediately release Saeed Abedini and all other individuals held or charged on account of their religion;

21. Reiterates its call on Iran to take steps to ensure that full respect is shown for the right to freedom of religion or belief, including by ensuring that its legislation and practices fully conform to Article 18 of the ICCPR; points out that this also requires that the right of everyone to change his or her religion, if he or she so chooses, be unconditionally and fully guaranteed;

22. Welcomes the talk of moderation and religious tolerance from Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani; believes that the EU should engage in a human rights dialogue with Iran;

23. Reiterates its call on the Council, the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission to pay greater attention to the subject of freedom of religion or belief and to the situation of religious communities, including Christians, in agreements and cooperation arrangements with third countries, as well as in human rights reports;

24. Welcomes the adoption by the Council on 24 June 2013 of the EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief; urges the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to fully implement these guidelines and to make full use of any tools and suggestions presented therein;

25. Supports all initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue and mutual respect between communities; calls on all religious authorities to promote tolerance and to take initiatives against hatred and violent and extremist radicalisation;

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26. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the European External Action Service, the Vice-President of the European Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Secretary-General of the UN, the UN Human Rights Council, UN Women, the Government of Syria, the Syrian National Council, the Government and Parliament of Pakistan, and the Government and Parliament of Iran.

P7_TA(2013)0423

Clashes in Sudan and subsequent media censorship

European Parliament resolution of 10 October 2013 on clashes in Sudan and subsequent media censorship (2013/2873(RSP))

(2016/C 181/16)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to its previous resolutions on Sudan and South Sudan,

— having regard to the statement of 30 September 2013 by the Spokesperson of the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the violence in the current protests in Sudan,

— having regard to the statement of 27 September 2013 by the Spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, urging restraint as death toll in Sudan fuel protests rises,

— having regard to the report of the UN Human Rights Council Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Sudan, of 18 September 2013,

— having regard to the statement of 6 September 2013 by the Spokesperson of the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Summit between the Presidents of Sudan and South Sudan in Khartoum in Sudan,

— having regard to the agreed outcome of the Government of Sudan, African Union and United Nations Tripartite Coordination Mechanism meeting on UNAMID held on 28 September 2013,

— having regard to the Roadmap for Sudan and South Sudan set out in the communiqué issued by the African Union Peace and Security Council on 24 April 2012, which is fully supported by the EU,

— having regard to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights,