



Plenary sitting

B8-1257/2015

24.11.2015

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 135 of the Rules of Procedure

on the freedom of expression in Bangladesh
(2015/2970(RSP))

Jean Lambert, Barbara Lochbihler, Igor Šoltes, Bodil Valero, Davor Škrlec, Heidi Hautala
on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

**European Parliament resolution on the freedom of expression in Bangladesh
(2015/2970(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous reports and resolutions on Bangladesh, in particular its resolution of 18 September 2014 on human rights violations in Bangladesh and the resolution of 16 January 2014 on the elections in Bangladesh,
- having regard to the press release of the Sub-committee on Human Rights of the European Parliament of 19 February 2015 on the human rights situation in the country, and in particular on the areas of labour rights, children and women and minority rights,
- having regard to the statement of 9 August 2015 by the European Union Delegation to Bangladesh on the murder of blogger Niladri Chatterjee Niloy,
- having regard to the statement of 11 February 2015 by the European Union Delegation to Bangladesh,
- having regard to the statement of 29 September 2015 by the European External Action Service Spokesperson on the killing of an aid worker in Bangladesh,
- having regard to the statement of 6 August 2015 by the European External Action Service announcing the EU supports people affected by floods in Myanmar and Bangladesh
- having regard to the statement of 29 April 2015 by the European External Action Service Spokesperson on the Mayoral elections in Bangladesh,
- having regard to the statement of 9 April 2015 by the European External Action Service Spokesperson on the imminent execution of Mr Muhammad Kamaruzzaman in Bangladesh,
- having regard to the statement of 1 April 2015 by the European External Action Service Spokesperson on the murder of bloggers in Bangladesh,
- having regard to the statement of 29 October 2014 by the European Union Delegation to Bangladesh on capital punishment in the country,
- having regard to the preliminary findings of 9 September 2015 of the country visit to Bangladesh by Heiner Bielefeldt, United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief,
- having regard to the statement of 7 August 2015 of United Nations' experts condemning the killing of blogger Niloy Neel,
- having regard to the statement of 29 April 2013 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights requesting the State to offer better protection to writers, publishers and others threatened by extremists in Bangladesh,

- A. Whereas on 19 November Bangladesh's Supreme Court rejected final appeals from both, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid - Secretary General of the Jamaat-e-Islami party and a former minister, and Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury -former BNP Member of Parliament - against death sentences for atrocities committed during the 1971 war of independence;
- B. Whereas the two convicted were executed on 22 November;
- C. Whereas there has been a worrying increase in extremist violence in Bangladesh in recent months; whereas at the same time the government has intensified clamp down on social media with temporary or full shut down of the entire internet, Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber and Messenger;
- D. whereas hours before the Supreme Court ruling, Piero Arolari, an Italian priest and medical doctor was shot, while on 28 September an Italian aid worker Cesare Tavella and on 3 October a Japanese social worker Hoshi Kunio were murdered and Islamic State militants have claimed responsibility, raising concerns about the security of international humanitarian workers in Bangladesh;
- E. Whereas on 24 October the main Shia Muslim shrine in Dhaka was bombed killing a teenage boy and wounding more than 100 people;
- F. Whereas the same month, Faisal Arefin Dipan was brutally murdered, a publisher of secular books written by the killed Bangladeshi-American blogger Avijit Roy and three other publishers and writers were attacked the same day but survived, acts claimed by Al-Qaeda in the Indian sub-continent (AQIS), while another four bloggers have been killed in similar brutal fashion earlier this year;
- G. Whereas the Government has made a number of arrests in connection with the murders of the above-mentioned publishers and writers;
- H. Whereas some of the victims were involved in advocacy for capital punishment for those accused of war crimes committed during the 1971 independence war and the government is blaming the BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami opposition parties to be complicit in the murders and wanting to destabilize the country ahead of the executions;
- I. Whereas both the government and the opposition contribute to further polarization in the country, the government staying accused of politicizing state institutions, civil service, police and judiciary, persecuting political rivals and leaving free rein to violent parts of the Shahbagh Movement rallying for execution of the sentenced war criminals, while the BNP leadership is animating the hatred by stigmatizing members of the Shahbagh as 'atheists' and enemies of Islam;
- J. Whereas the government has banned Ansarullah Bangla Team - who are affiliated to AQIS and have published a 'hit list' of secular bloggers, including a number of international writers - and arrested its leader and several members among them several Pakistani citizens, whereas however secularist bloggers and writers start living in fear or are even leaving the country for safety reasons;

- K. Whereas the number of people being killed on the Bangladeshi/Indian border remain high with over 40 citizens being killed in 2015 alone;
1. Expresses its serious concern about the increasing attacks of Islamist extremists against secularist writers, the Shia minority and foreign aid workers and extends its condolences to the bereaved families;
 2. deeply regrets the execution of Ali Ahsan Mohammad and Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury; re-iterates its opposition to the death penalty as a cruel and inhumane punishment as well as its reservations concerning the legal standard of the procedures of the International War Crime Tribunal;
 3. Calls for an urgent clarification of the whereabouts of members of the opposition who have disappeared over the last few years and an independent investigation into allegations of extra-judicial killings, particularly during the events in the months leading up to and subsequent to the January 2014 elections;
 4. Calls on the government to ensure that all human rights and civil society groups are able to work in a climate free of fear and repression and re-iterates notably its call to stop acts amounting to harassment against the human rights group Odhikar;
 5. Urges the government to ensure that members of political parties are free to exercise their democratic right to speech and assembly and immediately charge or release members of opposition parties who have been jailed for the peaceful exercise of such rights;
 6. Calls however also on the political opposition to refrain from attempts to use religion in order to further polarize Bangladeshi society which was renowned for its religious tolerance in the past;
 7. Restore the full independence of the media by, inter alia, dropping all charges against editors and journalists who have published content critical of the government, allow the immediate reopening of all media houses which were closed down, and immediately restore full and unhindered access to all forms of publications, including electronic ones;
 8. Welcomes recent efforts by the Government to arrest those responsible for the murders of the secular bloggers this year, and encourages cooperation from all sides to identify the perpetrators;
 9. appeals to the Parliament to amend the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act of 2014 in order to ensure that the work of civil society organizations is not subject to arbitrary controls, and that all decisions made under this Act are subject to an independent review process;
 10. urges also to bring the Cyber-Security Act of 2015 and the Information and Communication Technology Act in line with international free speech standards, and drop the criminalization of “anti-State” publications
 11. In line with the EU’s Strategic Framework on human rights and Democracy calls on EU

Member States, the EU High Representative, European External Action Service, the European Commission to raise the above concerns and recommendations with Bangladeshi authorities

12. Welcomes the recent meeting between the India and Bangladeshi Home Secretaries on the issue of border killings and hopes that the announcement to provide the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) with 'non-lethal weapons' will be put into practice urgently
13. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Government and Parliament of Bangladesh and the VP/HR of the Common Foreign Policy, Council, Commission.
 - having regard to its previous reports and resolutions on Bangladesh, in particular its resolution of 18 September 2014 on human rights violations in Bangladesh and the resolution of 16 January 2014 on the elections in Bangladesh,
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