



Plenary sitting

B9-0261/2019

17.12.2019

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 144 of the Rules of Procedure

on violations of human rights including religious freedoms in Burkina Faso (2019/2980(RSP))

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on behalf of the ECR Group

B9-0261/2019

European Parliament resolution on violations of human rights including religious freedoms in Burkina Faso (2019/2980(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its plenary debate of 17 September 2019 on the security situation in Burkina Faso,
 - having regard to the Cotonou Agreement,
 - having regard to the EU guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief, adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 24 June 2013,
 - having regard to the statement by the EEAS spokesperson of 7 November 2019 on the attacks in Burkina Faso,
 - having regard to Rule 144 of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas jihadist terrorists forced out from Syria are looking for new theatres and one of them is the Sahel,
- B. whereas Burkina Faso has become vulnerable to the instability that plagues the greater Sahel region and has witnessed in its Sahel northern regions the rise of jihadist terrorist groups, such as Al Qaida, Ansural Islam, Jama'at Nasr al -Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), that have easy access to Burkina Faso from their bases in Mali and Niger;
- C. whereas the jihadist terrorist groups are targeting both security forces and civilians, with a clear strategy to foster local antagonisms and to incite a war of religion, in a country that has a long history of peaceful coexistence between faiths and communities;
- D. whereas Burkina Faso has a strong tradition of religious tolerance and secularism and its 2012 constitution guarantees freedom of religion so that every individual has the right to choose, practice and change their religion;
- E. whereas on 1 December 2019 14 people were killed as a gunman opened fire in a church in Hantoukoura; whereas this attack brings the number of Christians killed to at least 41 in 9 reported jihadist attacks since the beginning of 2019;
- F. whereas, in addition, an unknown number of pastors and their families have been abducted and remain in captivity; Muslim extremists are expelling Christians from their villages in the north who have gone to IDP camps or family/friends in the south, centre or the capital, Ouagadougou; and churches have been closed in the north of the country to prevent further attacks, especially in rural areas;

- G. whereas, although there is no doubt that Christians are specifically targeted, the violence does not affect them exclusively, e.g. on 11 October 2019 a mosque in the town of Salmossi in northern Burkina Faso was attacked during Friday prayers;
- H. whereas the UN Secretary-General has stressed, including in his recently announced Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites, that houses of worship around the world must be safe havens for reflection and peace, not sites of bloodshed and terror, and people must be allowed to observe and practice their faiths in peace;
- I. whereas the unrest has led to a humanitarian crisis: 1.5 million people need assistance; according to UNHCR some 486,000 civilians have been forced to flee within the country, 267,000 of whom in the past four months alone (a four-fold increase since the start of this year), posing a serious challenge to the delivery of food, health or sanitation services to these internally displaced persons; a further 16,000 are refugees in neighbouring countries; and 2024 schools have been forced to close, depriving over 330,000 children of education, while jihadists are attempting to replace public schools with Muslim schools;
- J. whereas the government of Burkina Faso declared a state of emergency in seven administrative regions in an effort to contain the situation;
- K. whereas in its report “By Day We Fear the Army, By Night the Jihadists: Abuses by Armed Islamists and Security Forces in Burkina Faso”, Human Rights Watch documents the killings and harassment of villagers in the Sahel region by jihadist terrorists who threaten to execute those who collaborated with the government, while the security forces, who expected them to provide intelligence about the presence of armed groups, meted out collective punishment when they didn’t; whereas the Burkinabe government has promised to investigate the allegations that the counterterrorism operations of the Burkinabe security forces conducted in 2017 and 2018 resulted in extrajudicial killings, abuse of suspects in custody, and arbitrary arrests;
- L. whereas the exploitation of natural resources, including gold mines, and the corresponding trafficking by terrorist and criminal organisations also contribute to the instability;
- M. whereas in 2017, five countries - Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Mali and Mauritania - launched the G5 Sahel task force to combat the insurgents, and have committed to adopt an Integrated Strategic Framework to synchronise their efforts on security and development and to identify priority regions for their action;
1. Considers that the European Union, together with its Member States, must remain more committed than ever not only to the people and the authorities of Burkina Faso, but also to all the countries in the region, in order to respond in a coordinated manner to the current challenges of security, stability and development in the Sahel;
 2. Urges the government of Burkina Faso to develop a long term strategy aimed at fostering a more inclusive and cohesive society, and at rebuilding public trust, especially in the north of the country, by protecting people from jihadist groups;
 3. Asks the Burkinabe government to make good on its promise to investigate allegations of abuse by its security forces and to take concrete measures to prevent any further ones;

4. Notes that the deteriorating situation in Burkina Faso and its geopolitical implications for the Sahel region and the West, in particular Europe, may justify a civilian and/or military mission in order to strengthen security sector governance, human rights and the restoration of people's trust in their security forces;
5. Underlines that security is vital, but that it is not the only answer to the challenges that Burkina Faso is facing, and that, therefore, coordination between security and development and trade policies is one of the essential challenges;
6. Highlights that international coordination is also crucial and that the EU should be willing to engage even more with the whole region and integrate this in its new "EU-Africa Strategy - a partnership for sustainable and inclusive development";
7. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Member States, and the Government and Parliament of Burkina Faso.