

Human rights in Syria

European Parliament resolution of 24 May 2007 on Syria

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,
 - having regard to Article 11(1) of the Treaty on European Union, which establishes the promotion of human rights as an objective of Common Foreign and Security Policy and Article 177 of the Treaty establishing the European Communities,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on Syria and the Middle East and to its resolution of 26 October 2006 containing its recommendation to the Council on the conclusion of a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Syrian Arab Republic, of the other part¹,
 - having regard to the EU Presidency statement of 14 May 2007 on the sentencing of the intellectual Michel Kilo and the political activist Mahmoud Issa in Syria,
 - having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which was ratified by Syria on 21 April 1969,
 - having regard to Rule 115(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas respect for human rights is an essential part of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, manifested in a Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Syria and an Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Syrian Arab Republic, of the other part still to be finalised,
- B. whereas the European Parliament and its President have already intervened several times to obtain the release of human rights activists, politicians and parliamentarians detained in Syrian prisons,
- C. whereas Michel Kilo, a militant pro-democracy writer, who was arrested on 14 May 2006, mainly because of his position on the Beirut-Damascus Declaration, and Mahmoud Issa were sentenced on 13 May 2007 to a three-year prison term,
- D. whereas Suleiman Al-Shamar, leading member of the Democratic National Community, and Khalil Hussein, President of the Public Relations Office at the Kurd Future Trend, were sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for 'weakening the national ethic' and 'conspiring with a foreign country',
- E. whereas Fayek El Mir and Aref Dalila, members of various human rights organisations in Syria, have been detained in solitary confinement for six years now,

¹ *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA(2006)0459.

- F. whereas Syrian security forces arrested Kamal al-Labwani, a physician and co-founder of the Democratic Liberal Gathering, on 8 November 2005 upon his return from a trip to Europe, the United States and Egypt, and he has now been sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment with hard labour on politically motivated charges,
- G. whereas Anwar Al Bunni, a founding member of the Syrian Human Rights Organisation and a lawyer specialising in human rights issues, was arrested on the streets of Damascus in 2006 when he was on the verge of taking up a post as director of a human rights centre financed by the European Union and has now been sentenced to five years' imprisonment for 'spreading false information harmful to the state',
1. Expresses its great concern at the recent verdicts handed down to political prisoners and human rights activists in Syria which affect every political trend of the opposition;
 2. Is deeply concerned at the restrictions imposed on, and the charges made against, Mahmoud Issa, Fayek El Mir, Aref Dalila, Kamal al-Labwani, Anwar Al Bunni, Michel Kilo, Suleiman Al-Shamar and Khalil Hussein for exercising their democratic rights and engaging in peaceful activities;
 3. Urges the Syrian authorities to comply strictly with international human rights law and, in particular, with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, ratified by Syria in 1969 and 2004 respectively;
 4. Calls on Syria to respect freedom of opinion and the right to a fair trial;
 5. Urges the Syrian authorities to take note of the UN Human Rights Committee's concerns and to:
 - (a) ensure that the abovementioned detainees are treated well and not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment,
 - (b) ensure that detained or imprisoned persons are given prompt and regular access to their lawyers, doctors and families;
 6. Urges the relevant Syrian bodies to reverse the abovementioned judgments, drop the charges still pending in the Military Court of Damascus and release all the abovementioned prisoners of conscience and political prisoners;
 7. Calls for the abrogation of the state of emergency in Syria, which was established more than 40 years ago;
 8. Calls in particular on the Community institutions to provide all necessary support to Syrian civil society activists through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the newly adopted European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), including by implementing without delay the so-called ad hoc measures dedicated to human rights defenders;
 9. Asks Syria, which could play an important role in promoting peace in the region, to improve and support human rights and freedom of expression in the country;
 10. Calls on Syria to support the setting up of a penal tribunal of international nature once the

enquiry being led by Judge Brammertz, Commissioner of the UN International Independent Investigation Commission, in Lebanon is completed;

11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Government and the Parliament of the Syrian Arab Republic.