

P6_TA(2007)0542

Christian Communities

European Parliament resolution of 15 November 2007 on serious events which compromise Christian communities' existence and those of other religious communities

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948,
 - having regard to Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) of 1950,
 - having regard to Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) 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 and in particular her reports of 8 March 2007, 20 July 2007 and 20 August 2007,
 - having regard to its annual reports on the situation of human rights in the world and its previous resolutions on religious minorities in the world,
 - having regard to its resolutions of 25 October 2007 on Pakistan¹ and Iran²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 28 April 2005 on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2004 and the EU's policy on the matter³,
 - having regard to its resolution of 6 July 2005 on the European Union and Iraq – A framework for engagement⁴,
 - having regard to its resolution of 6 April 2006 on Iraq: the Assyrian community; the situation in Iraqi prisons⁵,
 - having regard to its resolution of 10 May 2007 on reforms in the Arab world: what strategy should the European Union adopt?⁶,
 - having regard to Rule 115(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas in its relations with the rest of the world, the European Union affirms and

¹ *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA(2007)0489.

² *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA(2007)0488.

³ OJ C 45 E, 23.2.2006, p. 107.

⁴ OJ C 157 E, 6.7.2006, p. 390.

⁵ OJ C 293 E, 2.12.2006, p. 322.

⁶ *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA(2007)0179.

promotes its values and contributes to peace, mutual respect between peoples and the protection of human rights,

- B. whereas it has on several occasions expressed itself in favour of the rights of religious communities and the protection of their identity all over the world and in favour of the recognition and protection of religious minorities, without any distinction,
- C. extremely concerned, in this connection, about the proliferation of episodes of intolerance and repression directed against Christian communities, particularly in the countries of Africa, Asia and the Middle East,
- D. recalling its commitment to the principles of freedom of thought, conscience and religion and freedom of religious observance everywhere in the world, and to the principle that the State and its public institutions should be secular; stressing that, everywhere in the world, these authorities have a duty to guarantee these freedoms, including the freedom to change religion,
- E. having regard to the importance of dialogue between religions to promote peace and understanding between peoples,
- F. whereas political and religious leaders have a duty at all levels to combat extremism and promote mutual respect,
- G. whereas, according to international human rights law and particularly Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance,
- H. whereas the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief highlights worrying situations where the freedom to adopt, change or renounce a religion or belief has been infringed and reports numerous cases of inter-religious discrimination and violence, killings and arbitrary detention for reasons of religion or belief,
- I. whereas other groups of people such as refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum-seekers, migrants, persons deprived of their liberty, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and children of believers also face a growing number of violations of their right to freedom of religion or belief; recalling, in this respect, the principle of non-refoulement, according to Article 33 of the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees,
- J. concerned at the recent violent events in Iraq, including the kidnapping of two Catholic priests, Fathers Pius Afas and Mazen Ishaq, on 14 October 2007 in Mosul, the assassination of two Assyrian Christian members of the organisation National Union of Bet-Nahrin, Zuhair Youssef Astavo Kermles and Luay Solomon Numan, on 28 June 2007 in Mosul, the murder of a Chaldean priest, P. Ragheed Ganni, and of three deacons who were his assistants, on 3 June 2007 in Mosul,
- K. deploring the situation of Assyrian villages in Turkish border areas such as the village of Kani Masi,

- L. concerned at the recent violent events in Pakistan, including the attack on a Christian church on 10 October 2007 in Godwinh on the outskirts of Lahore, the bombing on 15 September 2007 which seriously damaged the Saint John Bosco Model School, a school run by Mill Hill missionaries in the district of Bannu and the assassination of the Protestant Bishop Arif Khan and his wife on 29 August 2007 in Islamabad,
- M. deploring the murder in Gaza of Rami Khader Ayyad, owner of a Christian library, on 7 October 2007,
- N. saddened by the murder of two young Copts, Wasfi Sadek Ishaq and Karam Klieb Endarawis, on 3 October 2007 in Awlad Toq Garb in Egypt,
- O. horrified by the attacks on the Christian publishing house Zirve on 18 April 2007 in Malatya (Turkey) during which three Christians, Tilmann Geske, Necati Aydin and Ugur Yuksel, were murdered; recalling its resolution of 24 October 2007 on EU-Turkey relations¹ and its strong condemnation of the murders of Hrant Dink and the Catholic priest Andrea Santoro,
- P. deploring the kidnapping of the Catholic priest Giancarlo Bossi in the Philippines,
- Q. stressing in particular the seriousness of the situation of Christian communities in Sudan, where the Khartoum authorities continue to repress its members,
- R. whereas in recent years hundreds of Assyrian Christian families living in the Dora neighbourhood in the south of Baghdad have left the city as a result of intimidation, threats and violence,
- S. whereas the exodus of Christians from Iraq is cause for serious concern, as is underlined by the fact that, in 2006, of a total of 38 000 Iraqis registered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Syria, about 24% were Christian and whereas more than two million people have been internally displaced within Iraq, the vast majority of them belonging to Christian minorities, and are mainly moving to the Nineveh plains,
- T. having regard to the seriousness of the situation regarding religious freedom in the People's Republic of China, where the authorities continue to repress any religious expression, particularly by the Catholic Church, many of whose members and bishops have been imprisoned for a number of years and some of whom have died in prison,
- U. whereas in Vietnam too, the activities of the Catholic Church and of other religious communities have been severely repressed, as is demonstrated by the serious situation facing the communities of Vietnamese 'montagnards',
- V. 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 these countries,
- 1. Strongly condemns all acts of violence against Christian communities, wherever they happen, and urges the governments concerned to bring to justice the perpetrators of these crimes;

¹ *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA(2007)0472.

2. Strongly condemns all kinds of discrimination and intolerance based on religion and belief and acts of violence against all religious communities; urges the countries concerned to ensure that their constitutional and legislative systems provide adequate and effective guarantees of freedom of religion or belief as well as effective legal remedies for victims where the right to freedom of religion or belief is violated;
3. Points out that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right which is guaranteed by various international legal instruments; recalls, at the same time, its commitment to the fundamental concept of the interdependency of human rights;
4. Strongly supports any initiative to promote dialogue and mutual respect between religions; calls on all religious authorities to promote tolerance and to take initiatives against hatred and violent and extremist radicalisation;
5. Urges the governments of the countries concerned to improve the security situation of the Christian communities; stresses therefore that the public authorities have a duty to protect all religious communities, including Christian communities, from discrimination and repression;
6. Calls on the Commission and the Council to raise the subject of the situation of the Christian communities in the framework of the political dialogue with the countries where they are threatened, through the promotion of a strategic commitment from the countries concerned on the basis of the international treaties on human rights;
7. Calls on the Commission, the Council and the Member States to make further contributions to the strengthening of human rights and the rule of law using all the EU's foreign policy instruments;
8. Calls on the Commission and the Council to devote particular attention to the situation of religious communities, including Christian communities, in those countries where they are threatened, when drafting and implementing development cooperation and aid programmes with those same countries;
9. Calls on the European Union and the Member States to earmark more funds for the activities of the UNHCR and for humanitarian aid managed by that organisation;
10. Recommends that its relevant committees consider the situation of Christian communities, notably in the Middle East;
11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the UN Secretary-General and the UN Human Rights Council.