

## **P7\_TA(2013)0060**

### **Recent attacks on medical aid workers in Pakistan**

#### **European Parliament resolution of 7 February 2013 on recent attacks on medical aid workers in Pakistan (2013/2537(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Pakistan,
  - having regard to the statement issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef) on 18 December 2012,
  - having regard to the Commission communication entitled ‘A Special Place for Children in EU External Action’ (COM(2008)0055),
  - having regard to its resolution of 18 April 2012 on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World and the European Union’s policy on the matter, including implications for the EU’s strategic human rights policy<sup>1</sup>,
  - having regard to the EU-Pakistan five-year engagement plan of March 2012, which set out priorities such as good governance, cooperation in the field of women’s empowerment and dialogue on human rights,
  - having regard to the Council conclusions on Pakistan of 25 June 2012, which reiterate the EU’s expectations regarding the promotion of, and respect for, human rights,
  - having regard to the national polio eradication programme initiated by Pakistan in 1994,
  - having regard to the WHO’s Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) and to its new Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan (2013-2018),
  - having regard to the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid,
  - having regard to Rules 122(5) and 110(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas Pakistan, according to the WHO, is one of the last three countries in which polio is still endemic, with 198 infections in 2011; whereas, according to the WHO, a failure to stop polio would mean serious health risks for the region and beyond, as polio is a highly infectious disease;
- B. whereas on 1 January 2013 six medical aid workers and one doctor were gunned down on their way home from the community centre where they were employed by a non-governmental organisation in the north-western Swabi region, about 75 kilometres (45 miles) northwest of the capital, Islamabad;
- C. whereas from 17 to 19 December 2012 nine health workers involved in Pakistan’s polio eradication campaign, six of them women, were gunned down in Karachi and Peshawar;

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<sup>1</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2012)0126.

- D. whereas on 29 January 2013 a policeman providing security for a UN-protected polio vaccination team was killed near Swabi, and whereas on 31 January 2013 two polio vaccination workers were killed in a landmine blast in north-west Pakistan, although it is unclear whether this was a targeted attack;
- E. whereas in another attack in July 2012, a Ghanaian WHO doctor and his driver, who were helping fight polio in Karachi, were wounded;
- F. whereas it is suspected that all of these attacks were linked to campaigns to vaccinate Pakistani children against polio;
- G. whereas the latest series of killings prompted the WHO and Unicef to suspend polio campaigns in the country; whereas the Government of Pakistan and the provinces of Sindh and Khyber have also temporarily suspended the vaccination campaign on account of concerns over the safety of health workers;
- H. whereas the Pakistani Government has declared polio a national emergency and is currently undertaking a polio vaccination campaign in an effort to eradicate the disease within its borders; whereas this campaign is supported internationally by the WHO, Unicef and others and is part of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative; whereas the campaign is targeting 33 million children for vaccination, with several hundred thousand health workers, many of them women, carrying out vaccinations nationwide;
- I. whereas health sector spending in Pakistan receives less than 0,3 % of the annual budget, at both the federal and the provincial levels;
- J. whereas most attacks on health workers have taken place in north-western areas near militant strongholds, and are allegedly linked to the Taliban;
- K. whereas such attacks deprive children in Pakistan of their right to basic life-saving health interventions and place them at risk of a disease that causes lifelong disability;
- L. whereas the reason for the recent attacks seems to be opposition to the vaccination campaigns among Islamic extremist groups, who allege that the vaccine is intended to make Muslim children sterile;
- M. whereas, in order to justify their criminal acts, the Taliban have used the excuse that in the past foreign intelligence agencies used local vaccination teams across Pakistan for the purpose of gathering intelligence;
- N. whereas educators and health workers are increasingly being targeted by militant Islamic groups such as Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) and Jundullah, which oppose the anti-polio efforts in Pakistan, viewing them as a means of promoting a foreign, liberal agenda;
- O. whereas the deadly attacks reflect the growing insecurity faced by aid workers in Pakistan; whereas, according to the Aid Worker Security Database's 2012 report, Pakistan is among the five most dangerous countries for aid workers;
- P. whereas NGOs and aid workers play a vital role in many areas and provinces of Pakistan, in particular in tribal areas, where the government has been unable to provide services such as medical clinics or schools;

- Q. whereas most of the victims of the attacks on medical staff were women, which coincides with the Taliban militants' routine of attacking female workers and advocates in order to send the message that women may not work outside the home;
1. Strongly condemns the multiple killings of, and attacks on, medical workers and the security forces assigned to protect them which have taken place in recent months; stresses that these attacks deprive Pakistan's most vulnerable populations, especially children, of basic life-saving health interventions;
  2. Expresses its condolences to the victims' families;
  3. Welcomes the widespread condemnation of the attacks by the Government of Pakistan and the country's civil society;
  4. Calls on the Government of Pakistan to bring to justice those responsible for the attacks in recent months;
  5. Expresses its admiration for the courage and determination of those health workers, many of them women, who, despite facing great danger, work selflessly to eradicate polio and provide other health services to children in Pakistan;
  6. Stresses the need for aid workers to be able to operate in a secure environment; remains deeply concerned that international aid workers are being increasingly linked by militants to western intelligence agents and military forces;
  7. Emphasises that the interruption of the polio vaccination programme in Pakistan deals a serious blow to the worldwide efforts to eradicate polio once and for all in the near future;
  8. Welcomes the Pakistani Government's 'National Emergency Action Plan for Polio Eradication in 2012' and stresses the importance of its being continued successfully in order to avoid an increase in the number of infections; notes that since the start of the latest immunisation campaign the number of infections has reached historic lows;
  9. Welcomes the commitment expressed by the WHO and other international organisations to continue supporting the Government of Pakistan and the people of Pakistan in their efforts to rid the country of polio and other diseases;
  10. Calls on the Commission and the European External Action Service to look at working with the World Health Organisation in supporting the Lady Health Worker Programme, aimed at increasing access to basic preventive health services, particularly in rural areas;
  11. Welcomes the efforts already made by the Government of Pakistan to ensure safety during medical campaigns and to develop a new strategy to protect aid workers; calls on the Government of Pakistan, however, significantly to increase security measures for aid organisations and their workers;
  12. Calls on governments worldwide to safeguard the neutrality of humanitarian work, as a failure to do so may leave tens of thousands of people vulnerable to illnesses and endanger those who provide legitimate and essential health services;
  13. Is deeply concerned about the situation of women in Pakistan, particularly women and girls who become active in society and have received threats from the Taliban and other

extremist groups;

14. Encourages the Government of Pakistan to implement a comprehensive information campaign with a view to building up greater support and ownership in Pakistani society and enhancing the level of trust regarding vaccination campaigns; calls, in this connection, on the Pakistani Government to enter into dialogue with community leaders in order to address the root causes of the problem;
15. Believes that both the media and civil society in Pakistan, in cooperation with international organisations and NGOs involved in humanitarian action, have an obligation to help raise awareness of the important and independent role played by medical aid workers in assisting the population;
16. Reiterates the EU's readiness to provide assistance for the upcoming elections in Pakistan, which will be crucial for its democratic future and for stability in the region; notes that the EU has still not received a formal invitation letter from the Pakistani authorities to do so;
17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the European External Action Service, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, UN Women, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the UN Human Rights Council, Unicef, the WHO and the Government and Parliament of Pakistan.