

European Parliament resolution of 25 November 2010 on Iraq: the death penalty (notably the case of Tariq Aziz) and attacks against Christian communities

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Iraq,
- having regard to its previous resolutions on the abolition of the death penalty, in particular its resolution of 26 April 2007 on the initiative for a universal moratorium on the death penalty,
- having regard to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 62/149 of 18 December 2007, calling for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, and United Nations General Assembly Resolution 63/168 of 18 December 2008, calling for implementation of the 2007 General Assembly resolution 62/149,
- having regard to the speech of the Vice-President of the Commission/ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, on human rights policy, delivered in the plenary of 16 June 2010 and pointing out that the abolition of the death penalty worldwide is a priority for the European Union,
- having regard to the final declaration adopted by the 4th World Congress Against the Death Penalty, held in Geneva from 24 to 26 February 2010, which calls for universal abolition of the death penalty,
- having regard to Article 2 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to the Council conclusions adopted on 16 November 2009 on freedom of religion or belief, underlining the strategic importance of this freedom and of countering religious intolerance,
- having regard to the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief,
- having regard to the statements by the Vice-President of the Commission/ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, on Iraq, in particular that of 1 November 2010 following the attack against worshippers at Our Lady of Salvation Cathedral in Baghdad, Iraq,
- 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 Rule 122(5) of its Rules of Procedure,

The death penalty (including the case of Tariq Aziz)

A. whereas, on 26 October 2010, the Iraqi Supreme Court sentenced to death former Iraqi deputy premier Tariq Aziz, aged 74, together with Sadoun Shakir, former Interior Minister, and Abed Hamoud, former Private Secretary to Saddam Hussein; whereas if the appeal against the sentence is turned down, it is likely to be carried out within 30 days,

B. whereas at an earlier trial Tariq Aziz was sentenced to 22 years in prison in solitary confinement and that sentence was in fact a life sentence because of the fragile health of Tariq Aziz, who has suffered several strokes, as well as lung problems, in prison and underwent surgery following a blood clot in the brain,

C. whereas Iraq's President, Jalal Talabani, has stated that he will not sign the execution order for Tariq Aziz; whereas, under the Iraqi constitution, the President should ratify death sentences but there are mechanisms for executions to be carried out on parliamentary authority,

D. whereas the condemnation to death of Tariq Aziz will do little to improve the climate of violence in Iraq, and whereas Iraq is in dire need of national reconciliation,

E. whereas the EU is strongly committed to working towards the abolition of the death penalty everywhere and is striving to achieve universal acceptance of this principle,

F. whereas the death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, violating the right to life as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is an act of torture unacceptable to states that respect human rights,

Attacks against Christian communities

G. whereas, on 22 November 2010, two Iraqi Christians were killed in Mosul; whereas, on 10 November, a series of bomb and mortar attacks targeting Christian areas killed at least five people in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad; and whereas these attacks came after Islamist militants had seized a Syriac Catholic cathedral in Baghdad on 31 October 2010, leaving more than 50 worshippers dead,

H. whereas the militant group Islamic State of Iraq, considered part of the international Al-Qaida movement, has claimed responsibility for the killings and has vowed to launch further attacks against Christians,

I. whereas Article 10 of the Iraqi Constitution establishes the Government's commitment to assuring and maintaining the sanctity of holy shrines and religious sites; whereas Article 43 states that followers of all religious groups shall be free to practise their religious rites and manage their religious institutions,

J. whereas hundreds of thousands of Christians have fled from the country in the face of repeated attacks against their communities and churches; whereas many of the remaining Iraqi Assyrians (Chaldeans, Syriacs and other Christian minorities) are now internally displaced persons, having had to flee extremist violence aimed at them,

K. whereas the Assyrians (Chaldeans, Syriacs and other Christian minorities) constitute an ancient and indigenous people who are very vulnerable to persecution and forced emigration, and whereas there is a danger of their culture becoming extinct in Iraq,

L. whereas human rights violations in Iraq, notably against ethnic and religious minorities, continue at a disturbingly high level; whereas the safety and rights of all minorities, including religious groups, must be respected and protected in all societies,

M. whereas the EU has repeatedly expressed its commitment to freedom of thought, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion and has stressed that governments have a duty to guarantee these freedoms,

The death penalty (including the case of Tariq Aziz)

1. Reiterates its long-standing opposition to the death penalty in all cases and under all circumstances, including for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide,

and emphasises once again that abolition of the death penalty contributes to the enhancement of human dignity and the progressive development of human rights;

2. Deeply regrets, therefore, the decision of the Iraqi Supreme Court to sentence Tariq Aziz, Sadoun Shakir and Abed Hamoud to death; underlines, however, the importance of holding accountable those who violate human rights, including (former) politicians, in the framework of the rule of law and due process;

3. Urges the Iraqi authorities to reconsider their decision and not to carry out the death sentence pronounced by the Supreme Court; welcomes the announcement by President Talabani that he would not sign the execution order;

4. Encourages the Iraqi Government to sign and ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights concerning the abolition of the death penalty in all circumstances, and calls for an immediate moratorium on executions;

5. Points out that the full abolition of the death penalty remains one of the main objectives of EU human rights policy;

Attacks against Christian communities

6. Expresses its grave concerns over – and strongly condemns – the recent attacks on Christian and other religious communities in Iraq and the abuse of religion by the perpetrators of those acts;

7. Calls on the Iraqi authorities radically to increase their efforts to protect Christian and other vulnerable minorities, to step up action against interethnic violence and to do their utmost to bring the perpetrators of crimes to justice in accordance with the principles of the rule of law and international standards;

8. Reaffirms its full support for the population of Iraq and calls on all Iraqi political entities to work together against the threat of violence and terrorism; emphasises that the right of all religious groups to gather and worship freely must be protected; deplores the deliberate targeting of locations where civilians congregate, including places of worship; strongly condemns all acts of violence against churches and all places of worship and urges the EU and the international community to step up the fight against terrorism;

9. Expresses its solidarity with the families of the victims and expresses confidence that the Iraqi people will remain steadfast in their continued rejection of efforts by extremists to spark sectarian tension;

10. Welcomes the statement of the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 2 November 2010 calling on the specialised authorities and all security forces to stand firm against any attempts to separate Iraqi citizens on a sectarian or racial basis, and to provide protection for Iraqi citizens and safeguard religious practice;

11 Calls on the Council and the Commission, in particular the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, in view of the preparation of the first Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Iraq, to address the problem of Christians' safety within Iraqi borders as a priority issue.