



Human rights: Azerbaijan and return of North Korean refugees

Plenary sessions

All actions aimed at suppressing the freedom of expression and assembly in Azerbaijan should stop immediately, says a resolution adopted by the European Parliament on Thursday. Azerbaijan's hosting of the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest in its capital Baku on 26 May should be an opportunity for it to show its commitment to democracy and human rights, it adds. In a separate resolution, also passed on Thursday, Parliament calls on China to stop deporting North Korean refugees back to North Korea.

Citing reported attacks, harassment, threats and imprisonment of journalists, human rights defenders and others seeking to express their opinions, Parliament calls on the Azerbaijani authorities to stop suppressing the freedom of expression and assembly and to bring their legislation in these areas into line with international standards.

Parliament urges the Azerbaijani authorities to step up reform efforts in all areas of the judicial system, including prosecution, trial, sentencing, detention and appeals.

MEPs also criticize the expropriation of hundreds of properties and the forced eviction of thousands of people in the name of development projects, including those in the neighbourhood of Baku's Crystal Palace, the Eurovision Song Contest venue.

Parliament calls on the EU's High Representative for External Relations Catherine Ashton, the Council and the Commission to monitor the human rights situation in Azerbaijan after the Eurovision Song Contest closely and calls on EU member states to consider targeted sanctions against those responsible for human rights violations, should these persist.

North Korean refugees

In another resolution voted on Thursday, Parliament calls on China to stop deporting North Korean citizens back to North Korea, as returnees and their families are at "great risk of abuse and even execution".

MEPs hope China will end the 1986 repatriation agreement with North Korea and calls on the country to grant them safe passage to South Korea or other third countries.

Parliament also asks China to stop cooperating with North Korean security agents in tracing North Korean refugees with the aim of arresting them and instead to allow NGOs access to North Korean refugees and asylum seekers in China.

Furthermore, Parliament deeply regrets that four activists of the Seoul-based Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights were arrested in China on 29 March, while reportedly trying to help North Korean defectors, and face allegations of being "a threat to China's national security".

It calls on the Chinese authorities to grant the activists full consular access to the South Korean authorities and legal representation, and to release them swiftly.

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