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Plenary sitting

15.4.2014

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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 122 of the Rules of Procedure

on the situation in certain vulnerable communities in Syria
(2014/2695(RSP))

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on behalf of the ALDE Group

**European Parliament resolution on the situation in certain vulnerable communities in Syria
(2014/2695(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Syria,
- having regard to the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on Syria, in particular those of 20 January 2014; having regard to the European Council conclusions on Syria,
- having regard to the statements by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR), Catherine Ashton, on Syria,
- having regard to its recommendation to the Council of 13 June 2013 on the draft EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief,
- having regard to the statement on 29 March 2014 by Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary General for UN Humanitarian Affairs, Valerie Amos,
- having regard to the UNSC Resolution 2139 adopted on 22 February 2014,
- having regard to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,
- having regard to Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 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,
- having regard to Rules 122(5) and 110(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas Syria is home to diverse ethnic and religious groups, who lived in peaceful coexistence for centuries, including Alawite, Sunni and Christian Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Druze, Kurds, and Turks; whereas Sunni Arabs make up the largest population group in Syria;

B. whereas since the beginning of civil war in Syria in 2011, thousands of Armenians, Assyrians, Syriacs, Christians and Kurds, but also Sunni Arabs, have been killed, kidnapped and forced to leave their homes, including by being targeted by rebel groups linked to al-Qaeda or being caught in the crossfire; whereas religious sites have been destroyed and desecrated;

C. whereas until recently most of these communities tried to avoid taking sides in the conflict as many may recognize the need of a change of regime in Syria but also fear that if the secular government is overthrown, they will be targeted by Sunni jihadist rebels calling for the establishment of an Islamic state, or others; whereas attacks against Syrian minorities are evidence of the further sectarianisation of the Syrian conflict;

D. whereas an inclusive, diverse and democratic society, based on respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms is lacking in Syria;

E. whereas certain vulnerable communities in Syria, notably Christians, Armenians and Kurds, have always been part of the Syrian society, contributing to its development and advancement including their engagement in the sectors of education, health, and culture; whereas therefore communities have an important role to play in the democratisation of the country and need to be represented in any consultation on the country's future and in any reconciliation process;

F. whereas other vulnerable groups, such as women, children and LGBTIs, are also targeted and under increased risk; whereas a disproportionately high number of women and children are among Syrian refugees;

G. whereas most of those communities in Syria are concentrated around the cities of Aleppo and Damascus, border with Turkey and in the southern areas of Homs governorate near the Lebanese border.

H. whereas several UNHRC resolutions call on ‘all States, within their national legal framework, in conformity with international human rights instruments, to take all appropriate measures to combat hatred, discrimination, intolerance and acts of violence, intimidation and coercion motivated by religious and ethnic intolerance, including attacks on religious places, and to encourage understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to freedom of belief or religion’

I. whereas the European Union has repeatedly expressed its commitment to freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and freedom of thought, and has stressed that governments have a duty to guarantee these freedoms all over the world;

J. whereas Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights declares that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; whereas this right includes the freedom to have or to adopt or leave a religion or belief of one’s own choice, and the freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest this religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching;

K. whereas political and religious leaders have a duty at all levels to combat extremism and terrorism and to promote mutual respect among individuals and religious and ethnic groups;

1. Stresses the need to end the war in Syria, and the need for sustainable peace and reconciliation to build an inclusive, diverse and democratic society. Further reiterates in this regard that the rights of minorities are inextricably linked to respect for other fundamental

human rights and freedoms such as the right to liberty, security, equality and the right to freedom of expression

2. Reminds that any political process which could be the basis of a peaceful and irreversible transition to democracy in a post-Al Assad Syria must be inclusive and assure the participation of all democratic political actors, including the minorities and civil society organisations.

3. Strongly condemns the recent attacks against certain religious and ethnic communities in Syria, notably the Christians, Armenians and Kurds, and calls on all involved parties to stop all actions aimed at inciting inter-ethnic and inter-confessional conflict in Syria; recognises that the attacks against certain vulnerable communities are only one aspect of the Syrian civil war;

4. Urges current and future Syrian authorities to provide reliable and efficient protection for those communities and others and their safe and secure return to their homes, and to ensure that the perpetrators of these crimes and all persons responsible for the attacks are brought to justice and tried by due process.

5. Expresses its solidarity with the families of the victims and recognises the vulnerable position of certain communities, being put under pressure to take sides in the Syrian conflict, while worrying for the survival of their community.

6. Strongly condemns all forms of discrimination and intolerance based on religion and belief; stresses once again that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right and encourages Syrian opposition forces to declare or reconfirm their commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, and notably the freedom of religion, belief, conscience and thought and the freedom to leave one's religion.

7. Stresses the need to protect other vulnerable groups, such as women, children and LGBTIs as well.

8. Stresses that all actors have a duty to protect all the different minorities present in Syria, including Alawites, Kurds, Druzes, Armenians, Turks and Christians.

9. Stresses that humanitarian access for aid agencies to all groups involved in the conflict is essential.

10. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the parliaments and governments of the Member States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the UN-Arab League Special Envoy to Syria, the Parliament and Government of Armenia, the Parliament and Government of Turkey, and all the parties involved in the conflict in Syria.