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*Plenary sitting*

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**B8-0255/2017**

4.4.2017

## 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 135 of the Rules of Procedure

on Bangladesh, including child marriages  
(2017/2648(RSP))

**Barbara Lochbihler, Maria Heubuch, Heidi Hautala, Ernest Urtasun, Igor Šoltes, Davor Škrlec, Bronis Ropė**  
on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

**European Parliament resolution on Bangladesh, including child marriages  
(2017/2648(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Bangladesh, notably the one of 26 November 2015,
- having regard to the statements of the EU Delegation and the Spokesperson of the High Representative,
- Having regard to the report of the UN Human Rights Committee of 7 March 2017 in the context of the PNR procedure on Bangladesh in its 119th session,
- Having regard to the findings of the April 2016 ILO high-level tripartite mission and the recommendations for Bangladesh by the ILO Committee on Application of Standards for the year 2016,
- having regard to the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage which has Bangladesh as a focus country,
- having regard to the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development between the EU and Bangladesh and the EU General System of Preference 'Everything but Arms',
- Having regard to the Bangladesh EU Sustainability Compact,
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO core conventions - notably Convention 87 on freedom of association - to which Bangladesh is a party,
- having regard to the EU guidelines on Human Rights,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,
- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),
- Having regard to the fact that general elections will have to take place within the next 18 months,
- having regard to Rule 135 of its Rules of Procedure

A. Whereas clampdowns on civil society, attacks against government critics and members of opposition parties, torture and enforced disappearances have increased over the last years;

- B. Whereas bloggers, journalists and editors have been prosecuted and opposition media houses have been forcibly closed;
  - C. Whereas secret illegal detentions are on the rise and those detained have no recourse to any due process;
  - D. Whereas the government has intensified persecution of labour rights activists and repressive measures against trade unions, most recently following the December 2016 Ashulia wage strikes, detaining over a dozens union leaders; whereas the severe climate of anti-union violence frequently directed by the factory management without any sanctions has reportedly created a sense of impunity;
  - E. Whereas the current minimum wage has not been increased since 2013 while at the same time minimum wages have doubled in other major textile producing countries like Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia;
  - F. Whereas Bangladesh has the second-highest rate of child marriages in the world with 52 per cent of Bangladeshi girls married at the age of 18 according to UNICEF which represents however a significant decrease from 65 per cent in 2000;
  - G. Whereas Bangladesh is a member of the South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) which adopted a regional action plan to end Child Marriage and whereas Bangladesh has committed to taking steps to end Child Marriage in 2041;
  - H. Whereas on 27 February, the government passed the Child Marriage Restraint Bill, which - while keeping the minimum age of marriage for women at 18 and men at 21 - introduces exceptions in "special cases" or for the "best interests" of the adolescent with permission from the courts; whereas a consent from the child is not required; whereas the law came into effect after approval by the President on 11 March;
  - I. Whereas government representatives have been defending the new law with the need to protect the 'honour' of girls who have become pregnant, while women's rights organisations are concerned that it introduces a loophole to further encourage the practice of child marriage, which could lead to widespread abuse, legitimise statutory rape, and allow parents to force their girls to marry their rapists;
1. Is seriously concerned about the deterioration of the situation of human rights and rule of law in Bangladesh and calls on the Bangladeshi government to oblige the security forces to stop unlawful activities and to bring those involved in torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings to justice; calls on the government to effectively implement the Torture and Custodial Death(Prevention) Act of 2013;
  2. Underlines the importance of a climate free of fear and freedom of expression, assembly and association for political opposition parties, media and civil society activists in order to guarantee a peaceful pre-election phase and successful democratic elections;
  3. Calls on the government of Bangladesh to follow the recommendations made by the UN Human Rights Committee, including establishing an independent complaint mechanism to investigate reported allegations of torture and ill-treatment, as well as repealing the Information and Communication Technology Act as amended in 2013 and the Special Powers Act of 1974 and the Anti-Terrorism Act amended on 2012;

4. Urges the government to implement the recommendations by the ILO tripartite commission, notably to investigate acts of anti-union discrimination, to re-instate illegally dismissed workers and to impose sanctions against violators of union rights;
5. Regrets that the implementation of the Sustainability Compact has not much progressed and calls on the EU DG Trade to commence an investigation on Bangladesh on whether the country is in breach of the GSP 'Everything but Arms' scheme and would urgently have to improve compliance;
6. Urges the authorities to ensure that the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Bill, which is restricting access to foreign funding is not putting the effective operation of non-governmental organisations at risk;
7. Expresses its concern about the extraordinarily high percentage of child marriages in Bangladesh which could be exacerbated by the new Child Marriage Restraint Bill; urges to severely restrain the rules defining 'special cases' and that each 'special case' should be scrutinised by social workers, including via an interview with the concerned girl in absence of family members before the judge decides;
8. Hopes that instead, protection for adolescent girls can be improved through education of both sexes, rules to restrict the level of dowries, empowerment of children to raise their voices and become active change makers, as well as shelters for single mothers, economic opportunities and other measures;
9. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Government and Parliament of Bangladesh, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the parliaments and governments of the Member States, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Secretary General of the ILO.