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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

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

pursuant to Rule 115 of the Rules of Procedure

by Marios Matsakis, Karin Riis-Jørgensen, Frédérique Ries

on behalf of the ALDE Group

on Women's rights in Saudi Arabia

European Parliament resolution on Women's rights in Saudi Arabia

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolution on Saudi Arabia of 18 January 1996 and 10 March 2005,
 - having regard the ratification in October 2004 by Saudi Arabia of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),
 - having regard to Rule 115 (5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas on 14 November 2007 the General Court of Qatif (Saudi Arabia) doubled its sentence of lashings for a rape victim who had spoken out in public about her case and her efforts to seek justice,
- B. whereas in October 2006 this woman was sentenced to lashings because she was alone in a car talking with a man to whom she was not married,
- C. whereas an official at the General Court of Qatif has declared that the Court had increased the woman's sentence because of "her attempt to aggravate and influence the judiciary through the media",
- D. deeply concerned by the fact that this Court sentenced the rape victim to six months in prison and 200 lashes, more than double its October 2006 sentence, after its earlier verdict was reviewed by Saudi Arabia's highest court, the Supreme Council of the Judiciary,
- E. whereas Judge Al-Muhana of the General Court of Qatif banned the victim's lawyer Abd al-Rahman al Lahim from the courtroom and from any future representation of his client,
- F. taking note that M. Al Lahim had planned earlier this year to take legal action against the Ministry of Justice for failing to provide him with a copy of the verdict against his client so that he could prepare an appeal,
- G. whereas M Al Lahim faces a disciplinary hearing at the Ministry of Justice where sanctions can include suspension for three years and disbarment,
- H. particularly concerned that the criminalisation of any contact between unmarried individuals of the opposite sex in Saudi Arabia severely impedes the ability of rape victims to seek justice and that a court may view a woman's charge of rape as an admission of extramarital sexual relations unless she can prove, by strict evidence, that this contact was non-consensual,

- I. whereas women in Saudi Arabia continue to face many forms of discrimination in private and in public life and victims of sexual violence face enormous obstacles in the criminal justice system,
 - J. noting that state parties to international covenants on human rights (such as the C.E.D.A.W.) have the obligation to ensure the equal rights of men and women,
 - K. noting that King Abdullah announced on 3 October 2007 a judicial reform promising new specialised courts and training for judges and lawyers,
1. Calls on King Abdullah to cancel the ruling and drop all charges against the victim of this rape;
 2. Calls on the Saudi authorities to show compassion for the victim identified only as the girl from Qatif;
 3. Calls on the Saudi Arabian Government to reform the judiciary system of the country and to lift restrictions on women's rights including women's free movement; prohibition of driving, their employment opportunities, their legal personality and their representation in judicial processes;
 4. Calls on the Council and on the Commission to raise those issues during the next Joint Council and Ministerial meeting between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council;
 5. Calls on the Commission, in its relations with third countries, to encourage ratification of the international treaties on ending discrimination against women and to promote women's participation in economic, social and political life;
 6. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the UN General Secretary, Crown Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Saudi Arabian Government and the Secretary General of the Centre for National Dialogue of Saudi Arabia.