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Plenary sitting

18.1.2011

B7-0063/2011

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 122 of the Rules of Procedure

on Pakistan: murder of the governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer

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on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

European Parliament resolution on Pakistan: murder of the governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions,
- having regard to the Council conclusions adopted on 16 November 2009 on freedom of religion or belief in which it underlines the strategic importance of this freedom and of countering religious intolerance,
- having regard to the EU-Pakistan Joint Statement of 17 June 2009, in which both sides underlined the importance of an integrated long-term strategy including social economic development and the rule of law; as well as acknowledging the significance of non-military means in countering terrorism,
- having regard to the resolution on "Combating Defamation of Religions" adopted by a narrow vote in the UN Human Rights Council on 25 March, proposed yearly by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC),
- having regard to the Declaration of its President on the death sentencing of Asia Bibi of 19 November 2010,
- having regard to the Statement by the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on a death penalty case in Pakistan on 12 November 2010 and on the assassination of the governor of Punjab on 4 January 2011
- having regard to Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),
- having regard to the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion and Belief,
- having regard to Rule 122(5) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. Whereas on 4 January 2011, the Governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, was assassinated by one of his body guards,

B Whereas the murderer Mumtaz Qadri explained that he had attacked the governor because Mr. Taseer had publicly opposed the controversial blasphemy laws,

C. Whereas none of the other security guards who witnessed of Governor Taseer's assassination tried to stop the murderer in any way; Whereas the murderer was cheered and supported by hundreds of lawyers when he appeared in court and tens of thousands of demonstrators marched in the streets of Karachi to mark their approval for his deed; whereas a

leading Imam reportedly issued a fadwa against Sherry Rehman a former minister, reformist politician and well known journalist, justifying to kill her,

D. Whereas none of the leading Karachi clerics was ready to perform the funeral ceremony for Governor Taseer and whereas some party leaders reportedly equally did not attend the funeral,

E. Whereas Governor Taseer had sort presidential pardon for Aasia Bibi who was the first woman in Pakistan to have been sentenced to death on charges of blasphemy on 8 November 2010 and in an expression of solidarity had visited Ms. Bibi in prison together with his wife and daughter,

F. Whereas under the blasphemy legislation introduced in 1982 and 1986 by Zia ul-Haq any person who speaks ill of Islam or Mohammed commits a crime and faces the death penalty,

G. Whereas in Pakistan these laws have led to an increase of violence against minority groups, particularly Ahmadis, but also Christians, Shiites, Sikhs and Hindus, as well as critical citizens who dare to raise their voice against injustice, and is often used to carry out personnel vendetta since convictions are carried on the basis of testimonies,

H. Whereas although no death sentence based on blasphemy charges has been carried out in Pakistan, dozens of people have been lynched by angry mobs on allegations of blasphemy,

I. Whereas Ms. Bibi's case underlines these serious concerns - a poor farmhand of low cast, mother of five children and the only Christians in the village,

1. Is shocked and saddened by the murder of Governor Salman Taseer, expresses it's condolences to his family and comments him for his courage and moral strength to take a stance in favour of religious tolerance and humane treatment of the disempowered despite the polarized political climate prone to extremism;

2. Takes note that many rights groups criticise the lack of support for Governor Taseer's courageous stands by Pakistan's leaders - be it among politicians or in the military - and expresses its consternation and great concern over the amount of popular support for religious intolerance and outright murder manifest in the demonstrations and public support for the killer even in the legal profession;

3. Welcomes the condemnation of the murder by significant sections of the Pakistani press and notes the action of the media regulator has been taking against certain television stations for aspects of their coverage of the event; also commends the compassion shown by members of the public in their peaceful commemoration of Salman Taseer;

4. Feels gravely concerned about the future of democracy and human rights in Pakistan and expresses its full support for all those who continue the struggle to hold up the values of equality and tolerance in times of growing cultural, social and national antagonism - in Pakistan, in Europe and elsewhere;

5. Comments particularly the efforts of Shahbaz Bhatti, Minister for Minorities and Sherry Rehman, who introduced a bill seeking an end to the death penalty for blasphemy charges;

expects that the Pakistani authorities do their utmost to protect the lives of all those who are threatened by islamist radicals for their secular or diverging views;

6. Calls on the Pakistani authorities to immediately release Asia Bibi and to take measures to guarantee the safety of her family who had to go into hiding; calls on President Zadari to use his constitutional authority to pardon her;

7. Reiterates its concerns over the blasphemy law and expresses its strong disappointment over the Government's declaration on 30 December that it renounces its former intension of reforming the blasphemy law;

8. Considers that the freedom of belief as enshrined in the UN Covenant provides the adequate framework and reference to which all signatories should adhere, providing protection to their citizens in order to enable them to freely exercise their faith;

9. Insists that the Government of Pakistan should repeal the blasphemy law as well as section 295 C of the Penal Code which carries the mandatory death penalty for anyone found guilty of blasphemy;

10. Calls on the Government of Pakistan to urgently enhance investments into education promoting tolerance, better mutual understanding and respect for the diversity of beliefs and calls on the European Commission and the Member States in their contacts with the government to put strong emphasis on this burning issue;

11. Calls on the Government to guarantee the human rights of minorities laid down in the Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, notably Art. 18 which provides that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion";

12. Calls on the Council of the European Union to include the issue of religious tolerance in society in its counter-terrorism dialogue with Pakistan, this matter being of central importance to the long-term fight against religious extremism;

13. Calls upon the Member States and the European Commission to continue financial support of human rights organizations and defenders and outline practical measures to support the growing civil society movement in Pakistan against the blasphemy laws and other discriminatory legislation;

14. Calls on the Council to support the government of Pakistan in the development of its Ministry for Minorities and its Ministry for Human Rights, and in establishing a meaningful, independent and authoritative National Human Rights Commission;

15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and the Government and Parliament of Pakistan.