



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Plenary sitting

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B7-0178/2011

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 Shahbaz Bhatti, Minister for Minorities

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on behalf of the ECR Group

European Parliament resolution on Pakistan - murder of Shahbaz Bhatti, Minister for Minorities

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Pakistan, in particular those of 20 January 2011 and 20 May 2010,
- having regard to its previous resolutions on freedom of religion or belief and the situation of Christians, in particular the one of 20 January 2011,
- having regard to the statement by High Representative Catherine Ashton on 2 March 2011,
- having regard to the statement by President Buzek on 2 March 2011,
- having regard to Rule 122(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
 - A. whereas on 2 March 2011 Pakistani Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti, was brutally killed by three armed men, as he travelled to his work in Islamabad,
 - B. whereas Mr. Bhatti was the only Christian Minister in the Government of Pakistan and an outspoken critic of Pakistan's blasphemy laws and defender of Asia Noreen who is sentenced to death under the blasphemy laws, and had therefore received numerous death threats,
 - C. whereas on 4 January 2011 another outspoken and public critic of Pakistan's blasphemy laws, Mr. Salman Taseer, Governor of Punjab Province was murdered,
 - D. whereas one by one the vocal critics of the blasphemy laws in Pakistan are threatened and even murdered and whereas therefore the public debate on these controversial laws is increasingly stifled,
 - E. whereas in spite of repeated threats to the life of Mr Bhatti by islamist groupings on account of the Minister's campaign against the blasphemy laws no increased police or army provisions for close protection security was given,
 - F. whereas the blasphemy laws continue to be misused for settling of personal scores, targeting of religious minorities and other purposes and even though no higher court has yet issued death sentences on the basis of these laws, accused people languish in prison for years (which is the case for example with Asia Bibi who has been sentenced to death for blasphemy and has been imprisoned since June 2009, waiting for the court to rule on her appeal), have to flee for

their lives upon release and so far at least 34 extrajudicial killings of people accused under the blasphemy laws have been recorded,

1. Condemns the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti, Minister for Minorities' Affairs in Pakistan and offers sincere condolences to his family, friends and supporters;
2. Notes that this tragedy comes only two months after the assassination on 4 January 2011 of Punjab Governor, Salmaan Taseer who, like Minister Bhatti, was an outspoken opponent of Pakistan's blasphemy laws;
3. Considers that the three days of mourning for the death of Mr. Bhatti, announced by the Government of Pakistan, is a good and welcome gesture, but it will have to be backed up by concrete action;
4. Calls for the Government of Pakistan to act rapidly and transparently to investigate Shahbaz Bhatti's killing and bring the perpetrators to justice, as well as ensuring the swift and fair prosecution of Salmaan Taseer's self-professed killer, thereby discouraging future killings by giving a clear sign that perpetrators cannot act/kill (those who speak up for reforms and democracy) with impunity;
5. Applauds Minister Bhatti's proven commitment to justice, interfaith dialogue and freedom of religion or belief in Pakistan, despite the personal risk involved;
6. Recognises Minister Bhatti's life-long dedication to combating the blasphemy laws and the injustices they have facilitated; recognises the progress made during his period as Minister, including significant, discrete negotiations on potential amendments to these laws;
7. Recognises that the national debate on the blasphemy laws has become volatile and polarised in the extreme; that all those standing for amendment or repeal now face the risk of violent suppression; that the space for debate on this and related issues has been drastically reduced; and that this represents a violation of the freedom of speech expressed in Article 19 of the Pakistani Constitution;
8. Notes with alarm the change in Pakistani State policy on the issue of the blasphemy laws; that plans announced for a committee to review these laws have not been forthcoming and instead that Prime Minister Gilani recently denied any intention by the government to review the laws;
9. Urges the Government of Pakistan to reconsider its stance on the blasphemy laws, to restart negotiations on potential amendments to the legislation, to facilitate open dialogue in society on the subject; and ultimately to repeal the blasphemy laws; condemns, in this respect, the actions by Chief Justice Khwaja Sharif of the Lahore High Court, who in December 2010 barred the government from introducing any changes in the blasphemy laws;

10. Urges the Government of Pakistan to make sure that Asia Noreen (Asia Bibi), sentenced to death by hanging by a judge at the court of Sheikhpura, Punjab, in November 2010, will be released;
11. Urges the Pakistani state to prosecute those inciting violence in Pakistan, noting in particular those calling for and, in some cases, offering rewards for the deaths of individuals and groups with whom they disagree; and to take further measure to facilitate debate on the issue; urges, in this respect, the Pakistani state to reform the madrassas, which are more often than not places where hatred and intolerance is preached;
12. Urges the Pakistani state to support the Ministry for Minorities in continuing the work and vision of Shahbaz Bhatti, in particular the national level dialogue between religious leaders and the grassroots project on District Interfaith Harmony Committees; and to appoint a strong and impartial minority representative to lead this;
13. Urges the Pakistani state to review security arrangements and ensure that sufficient protection is provided for prominent human rights defenders and politicians advocating for a reform or repeal of blasphemy laws, such as Ms. Sherry Rehman, and for lawyers defending cases related to blasphemy accusations;
14. Invites Pakistan to set up an independent Human Rights Commission managed by equal representation of men/women and minorities, to monitor human rights violations and to protect the rights of Pakistani people in particular women and minorities;
15. Calls upon the Member States and the European Commission to support initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue and mutual respect between communities, and at critically reviewing its funding of educational curricula in Pakistan, making sure that any material provoking religious hatred is swiftly removed;
16. Calls upon the Member States and European Commission to increase financial support of human rights organisations and defenders and identify practical means to support the growing civil society movement in Pakistan against the blasphemy laws and other discriminatory legislation;
17. Reiterates its call on the High Representative to develop a permanent capacity within the human rights directorate of the European External Action Service to monitor the situation of governmental and societal restrictions on religious freedom and related rights;
18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and the Government and Parliament of Pakistan.