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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 recent cases of violence and persecution against Christians, notably in Maaloula (Syria), Peshawar (Pakistan) and the case of Pastor Saeed Abedini (Iran)  
(2013/2872(RSP))

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on behalf of the ECR Group

**European Parliament resolution on recent cases of violence and persecution against Christians, notably in Maaloula (Syria), Peshawar (Pakistan) and the case of Pastor Saeed Abedini (Iran) (2013/2872(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948,
- having regard to Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) of 1950,
- having regard to Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) 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 its resolution of 13 December 2012 on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2011,
- having regard to its resolution of 20 January 2011 on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion,
- having regard to its resolution of resolution of 27 October 2011 on the situation in Egypt and Syria, in particular of Christian communities,
- having regard to its resolution of 20 May 2010 on religious freedom in Pakistan,
- having regard to its resolution of 14 June 2012 on the situation of ethnic minorities in Iran,
- having regard to the EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief,
- having regard to the numerous statements by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on violence and persecution against Christians, in particular the one of 23 September 2013 condemning the attack on the Christian community in Peshawar, Pakistan,
- having regard to the annual reports and interim reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief,
- having regard to Rule 122 of its Rules of Procedure,

### ***Freedom of religion or belief***

- A. whereas the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights and civil liberties are fundamental principles and aims of the European Union and constitute common ground for its relations with third countries,
- B. whereas, according to international human rights law and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in particular, everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; whereas this right includes freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching, whereas according to the UN Human Rights Committee the freedom of religion or belief protects all beliefs, including theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs,
- C. whereas the European Union has repeatedly expressed its commitment to freedom of thought, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion or belief and has stressed that governments have a duty to guarantee these freedoms all over the world,
- D. whereas freedom of religion or belief is often seen as a litmus test for other freedoms and human rights;
- E. whereas in some cases the situation facing Christian communities is such as to endanger their future existence, and if they were to disappear, this would entail the loss of a significant part of the religious heritage of the countries concerned,
- F. whereas according to various reports, government repression and social hostility against individuals and groups from various religious or belief backgrounds are on the increase, in particular in Arab Spring countries and parts of Africa;

### ***Maaloula, Syria***

- G. whereas on 4 September 2013, a truck driven by a Jordanian suicide bomber exploded near a checkpoint of the Syrian Army at the entrance of Maaloula, starting an assault on the town by rebel forces, reportedly from the jihadist Al-Nusra Front; whereas in the days that followed sections of the town changed hands several times as fighting raged between the Syrian Army and the rebel forces; whereas the Syrian Army claims to have recaptured and secured the town since 15 September; whereas it is not possible to establish the number of casualties, but it is reported that dozens of rebels, dozens of Syrian Army soldiers and supporting militia, and dozens of local citizens have died in the fighting;
- H. whereas the predominantly Christian town Maaloula has for many centuries known peaceful coexistence between its religious communities; whereas it is reported that the rebels claim they took Maaloula to punish the Christians there for supporting the Assad government; whereas it is furthermore reported that in some cases Christians were forced to convert to Islam and that those who refused were murdered; whereas events in Maaloula are evidence of further sectarianization of the Syrian conflict;

### ***Peshawar, Pakistan***

- I. whereas on 22 September 2013 a terrorist attack on the All Saints Church in Peshawar, Pakistan, claimed the lives of more than 80 people, mostly churchgoers, and injured more than 120; whereas in Peshawar in the same week 18 people died when a bus with government employees was attacked, and at least 38 people died in a terrorist attack with a car bomb on the Kissa-Khwani Market;
- J. whereas Christians and other religious minorities in Pakistan are frequently targeted by terrorists; whereas however the attack on the All Saints Church was the deadliest attack on Christians in the country to date; whereas furthermore religious minorities are disproportionately victimized by government discrimination and indifference in the country, through selective use of the blasphemy law and other legal provisions;

### ***The case of Pastor Saeed Abedini, Iran***

- K. whereas preceding Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's visit to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2013, roughly 90 political prisoners were released across Iran; whereas however, the vast majority of Iran's prisoners of faith and conscience, including members of the Baha'i, Christian and Muslim faiths, held solely for their religious beliefs, remain imprisoned;
- L. whereas one such prisoner of conscience is 33-year old husband and father of two Saeed Abedini, who served as a pastor to many house churches in the early 2000s; whereas Mr Abedini is serving an eight-year sentence since September 2012 and has reportedly been abused and repeatedly been denied necessary medical treatment;

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- M. whereas the above mentioned examples are only a few of the unending stream of major and minor attacks and cases of discrimination against Christians in various parts of the world; whereas there is also widespread discrimination and persecution of other religious minorities; whereas for example in North Korea any religion is prohibited; whereas in northern Nigeria moderate Muslims and Christians are equally targeted; whereas in Iraq and Syria extremist violence takes place across sectarian and ethnic lines; whereas in China several religions and religious cults are prohibited or repressed; whereas forms of religious discrimination and persecution take place on a daily basis almost all over the world;
- 1. Is shocked and saddened at so many attacks and other instances of repression and persecution of Christians around the world and offers its condolences to the bereaved families; is equally concerned about repression and persecution of other faith and belief groups;
- 2. Strongly condemns all acts of violence and instances of persecution against anyone for the sake of religion or belief; highlights and reminds that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief is a fundamental human right guaranteed by international legal instruments to which most countries in the world have committed and which are recognized as holding universal value;

### ***Maaloula, Syria***

3. Is deeply concerned about reports of the violence in Maaloula and in particular about the reports of forced conversions, which it strongly condemns;
4. Is deeply concerned about the continued violence across Syria and the increasing sectarianization of the civil war; is aware that certain communities, such as the Christians, are being caught in the crossfire; urges all sides to refrain from targeting civilians and in particular religion and belief groups;

### ***Peshawar, Pakistan***

5. Strongly condemns the attack on the All Saints Church in Peshawar and the other recent terrorist attacks;
6. Echoes the High Representative's call on the Government of Pakistan to take stronger action to ensure the protection of all its citizens, regardless of their religion or belief, and to bring to justice all groups and individuals responsible for inciting and carrying out acts of terror; furthermore urges the Government of Pakistan to scrap or reform blasphemy law and other legal provisions that are being abused to target religious minorities and to unequivocally commit to equal rights for all and to end the atmosphere of impunity for attacks on religious minorities;

### ***The case of Pastor Saeed Abedini, Iran***

7. Is deeply concerned regarding the Government of Iran's state-sponsored persecution of religious minorities in Iran;
8. Is deeply concerned regarding the Government of Iran's continued persecution, imprisonment, and sentencing of Saeed Abedini on the charge of attempting to undermine state security by creating a network of Christian churches in private homes;
9. Calls on the Government of Iran to exonerate and immediately release Saeed Abedini and all other individuals held or charged on account of their religion;

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10. Calls on the Council, the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in the framework of EU external relations, to pay particular attention to the situation of religious minorities, including Christian communities around the world, through the promotion of a strategic commitment from the countries concerned on the basis of the international treaties on human rights; and to devote particular attention when drafting and implementing development cooperation and aid programmes with those same countries;
11. Welcomes in this regard the adoption by the Council on 24 June 2013 of the EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief; urges the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to fully implement the Guidelines and to make full use of any tools and suggestions presented in these;

12. Supports all initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue and mutual respect between communities; calls on all religious authorities to promote tolerance and to take initiatives against hatred and violent and extremist radicalisation;
13. 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, the Government and Parliament of Syria and the Syrian National Coalition, the Government and Parliament of Pakistan and Iran, the UN Secretary-General and the UN Human Rights Council.