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Plenary sitting

8.10.2013

B7-0450/2013

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 S&D Group

B7-0450/2013

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 its previous resolutions on human rights and democracy in Pakistan, in particular of 19 May 2010 on religious freedom in Pakistan, as well as those of 20 January and 8 December 2011 and of 12 July, 5 October and 15 November 2007,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Syria,

- having regard to the Council conclusions of 21 February 2011 on intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion or belief as well as the Council conclusions of 16 November 2011 underlining the strategic importance of freedom of religion or belief and of countering religious intolerance,

- having regard to the resolution of 26 March 2009 on combating defamation of religions of the Human Rights Council in Geneva,

- having regard to Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

- having regard to Rule 122(5) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas Article 3(5) of the Treaty on the European Union states that the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights and civil liberties are fundamental principles and aims of the EU and constitute common ground for, its relations with third countries,

B. whereas on 22 September 2013 a twin suicide bomb attack occurred at the All Saints Church in Peshawar, killing more than 80 worshipers and injuring at least 130; whereas this attack is the deadliest so far on the Christian minority in the history of Pakistan,

C. whereas the Tehrik-i-Talibaan Pakistan-linked Islamist group Jundullah claimed responsibility for the attack saying they would continue with attacks on Christians and non-Muslims because they are enemies of Islam and that they would not stop until US drone attacks in Pakistan cease; whereas the Tehrik-i-Talibaan Pakistan denied any involvement in the blast and having any links with Jundullah,

D. whereas Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif condemned the attack saying that targeting innocent people is against the teachings of Islam,

E. whereas the majority of Pakistani Christians lead a precarious existence, often fearful of allegations of blasphemy, a subject which can provoke outbursts of public violence,

F. whereas Pakistan's blasphemy laws make it dangerous for religious minorities to express themselves freely or engage openly in religious activities,

G. whereas Maaloula is a symbol of Christian presence in Syria and has been home to different religious communities who have lived in peaceful coexistence for centuries; whereas every September Syrians of all religions have participated in the Day of the Cross festival in this town; whereas Maaloula is one of the three towns and villages in the country where Aramic is still being spoken by the local population;

H. whereas the violent clashes in Maaloula are the first attacks targeting specifically a notable Christian community since the beginning of the violent crisis in Syria; whereas at least four people were killed in these clashes while others were kidnapped or disappeared; whereas since fighting began in the town, most of its 5000 residents have fled to neighbouring villages or to Damascus;

I. whereas the Convent of St Tekla (Mar Takla) has historically been home for nuns and for orphans of both Christian and Muslim religions; whereas around 40 nuns and orphans stay in Maaloula despite the intense fighting and are trapped in the Convent under deteriorating conditions due to the lack of water and other supplies;

J. whereas, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, among the rebels who clashed with government forces, on the one hand, and with the local popular committee, on the other, were members of the al-Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra Front;

1. Condemns the terrorist attacks on the All Saints Church in Peshawar and against the Christian community of Maaloula in the strongest terms and offers its condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims;

2. Urges the Government of Pakistan to do everything in its power to bring the perpetrators of the attack on the All Saints Church in Peshawar attack to justice; calls for 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;

3. Is deeply worried about the growing danger for Christians in Pakistan given the recent rise of attacks on this minority such as the persecution of hundreds of Christians in March in Lahore by Islamic zealots over allegations of blasphemy against Islam;

4. Expresses its deep concern that the controversial blasphemy laws are open to misuse that can affect people of all faiths in Pakistan; expresses its particular concern that the use of the blasphemy laws is currently on the rise to target Christians in Pakistan;

5. Calls on the Government of Pakistan to carry out a thorough review of the blasphemy laws and their current application, as well as - inter alia - of Section 295 C of the Penal Code which prescribes a mandatory death penalty for anyone guilty of blasphemy;

6. Recalls that freedom of religion and minority rights are guaranteed by Pakistan's constitution; encourages all Pakistanis to work together to promote and ensure tolerance and mutual understanding;

7. Welcomes the measures taken in the interest of religious minorities by the Government of Pakistan since November 2008, such as establishing a five per cent quota for minorities in the federal job sector, recognising non-Muslim public holidays and declaring a National Minorities Day;
8. Expresses its deep concern about the rise of religiously and ethnically motivated violence in the violent crisis provoked by the brutal crackdown of the regime against its population in Syria, and calls for an immediate end to any such action;
9. Calls for immediate support and humanitarian assistance to the nuns and orphans trapped in the Convent of St Tekla (Mar Takla); calls on all sides involved in the conflict to allow access to the Convent to humanitarian groups;
10. Expresses its deep concern about the increasing involvement of extremist groups and foreign non-state actors in the crisis in Syria, and about the possible spill-over of violence in neighbouring countries, which is a major threat to stability and security in the Middle East and beyond;
11. Encourages the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces to create a united, inclusive and organised opposition front internally and externally in order to offer a credible alternative to the current regime and to marginalise Islamist extremists, and calls for further EU support for the Coalition in this context;
12. 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 of Pakistan.