



8.10.2013

B7-0452/2013

## 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), Pashawar (Pakistan) and the case of Pastor Saeed Abedini (Iran)  
(2013/2872(RSP))

**Cristian Dan Preda, Bernd Posselt, Tunne Kelam, Eduard Kukan, Roberta Angelilli, Laima Liucija Andrikiienė, Jarosław Leszek Wałęsa, Lena Kolarska-Bobińska, Petri Sarvamaa, Monica Luisa Macovei, Eija-Riitta Korhola, Philippe Boulland, Jean Roatta, Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris, Giovanni La Via, Sari Essayah, Zuzana Roithová, Krzysztof Lisek, Csaba Sógor, Anne Delvaux, Anna Záborská**  
on behalf of the PPE Group

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

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its resolutions of 15 November 2007 on serious events which compromise Christian communities' existence and those of other religious communities, that of 21 January 2010 on attacks on Christian communities, that of 6 May 2010 on the mass atrocities in Jos, Nigeria, that of 20 May 2010 on religious freedom in Pakistan and that of 25 November 2010 on Iraq: the death penalty (notably the case of Tariq Aziz) and attacks against Christian communities, that of 20 January 2011 on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion, that of 27 October 2011 on the situation in Egypt and Syria, in particular of Christian communities, and that of 13 December 2012 on the annual report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2011 and the European Union's policy on the matter,
- having regard to the European Parliament recommendation to the Council of 13 June 2013 on the draft EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief,
- having regard to the statement of 23 September 2013 by Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission, condemning the attack on the Christian community in Peshawar, Pakistan,
- having regard to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,
- having regard to Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 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 the reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief,
- having regard to Rule 122 of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the European Union has repeatedly expressed its commitment to freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and freedom of thought, and has stressed that governments have a duty to guarantee these freedoms all over the world; whereas the development of human rights, democracy and civil liberties is the common base on which the European Union builds its relations with third countries and has been provided for by the democracy clause in the agreements between the EU and third

countries;

- B. whereas the number of attacks against Christians has risen worldwide as well as their prosecution; whereas statistics on religious freedom in recent years show that the majority of acts of religious violence are perpetrated against Christians; whereas in some cases the situation that Christian communities are facing 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;
- C. whereas there have been recurrent acts of violence against Coptic Christians in Egypt over recent years; whereas the terrorist Islamist sect Boko Haram continues to target Christians, moderate Muslims and other religious groups in Nigeria, whom it is driving out of the country's majority-Muslim north; whereas hundreds of thousands of Christians have fled from Iraq in the face of repeated attacks against their communities and churches;
- D. whereas the Christians from Maaloula, who still speak Aramaic (the language spoken by Jesus Christ), were attacked by a highly influential Jihadist group present inside the Free Syrian Army: Jabbat Al Nosra, which is an extremist rebel group linked to Al-Qaeda; whereas Maaloula, which was the epitomize of peaceful cooperation between minorities in Syria, is now a ghost town;
- E. whereas there were many rumours that this terrorist group massacred Christians and forced other ones to convert to Islam, including children; whereas the alternative to conversion seemed to be decapitation on the spot;
- F. whereas Jabbat Al-Nosra has tainted the reputation and the legitimacy of the Free Syrian Army, regarding the different attacks made against Christians by the Al-Qaeda's groups in Maaloula and other Christian sites, like Dar Mar Moussa, a Monastery in the middle of the Syrian desert which is the symbol of intercultural dialogue, where Father Dell'Oglio was kidnapped or killed;
- G. whereas on 22 September 2013, in a double suicide bomb attack on the All Saints Church in Kohati Gate, a suburb of Peshawar, at least 82 people were killed and more than 120 were injured;
- H. whereas it is reported that the attack came from the side of two Islamist groups with Taliban links that have vowed to kill non-Muslims as a retaliation for US lethal drone strikes in the tribal North West;
- I. whereas Christians are a small and politically weak minority in the Muslim-majority country Pakistan who suffer from prejudice and sporadic bouts of mob violence;
- J. whereas on 9 March 2013, Muslims in Lahore torched more than 150 Christian homes and 2 churches responding to an allegation of blasphemy;
- K. whereas Saeed Abedini, an Iranian-American Pastor imprisoned in Iran since 26 September 2012, was sentenced on 27 January 2013 by a revolutionary court in Iran to an eight-year prison term on charges of disturbing national security by creating a

network of Christian churches in private homes; whereas it is reported that Saeed Abedini has suffered physical and psychological abuse in prison;

- L. whereas the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran asserts that Christians should not face sanctions for manifesting and practising their faith, and therefore remains concerned that Christians are reportedly being arrested and prosecuted on vaguely-worded national security crimes for exercising their beliefs;
1. Strongly condemns the recent attacks against Christians in various countries and expresses its solidarity with the families of the victims; expresses once again its deep concerns about the proliferation of episodes of intolerance, repression and violent events directed against Christian communities, particularly in the countries of Africa, Asia and the Middle East; urges the governments to ensure that perpetrators of these crimes and all persons responsible for the attacks, as well as for other violent acts against Christians or other religious minorities, are brought to justice and tried by due process;
  2. Strongly condemns all acts of violence against Christians and other religious communities as well as all kinds of discrimination and intolerance against religious people; stresses that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right;
  3. Reiterates its concern about the exodus of Christians from various countries, especially Middle Eastern countries, in recent years;
  4. Is worried about the current situation of Christians in Syria, and more especially about the Jihadist attacks against the Monasteries of Maaloula in September 2013;
  5. Is concerned about the consequences of these attacks and the possible risks existing for this minority; notes that Christians and Muslims used to coexist peacefully in this village, even during the conflict until now, and these attacks have breached the excellent relations between them;
  6. Stresses that the Free Syrian Army has to define a real leadership and eradicate the jihadist nests inside the rebel groups in order to prevent this kind of horror against the minorities; underlines that the Syrian Opposition has to consider the protection of all the different minorities present in Syria, including Shias, Alawites, Kurds, Druzes and Christians;
  7. Emphasises that the Monasteries of Maaloula have to be secured in order to preserve life, religious activities, the architectural treasures, and to let Christians and Muslim live peacefully together;
  8. Strongly condemns the attack on the All Saints Church in Peshawar as well as the attacks on Christians which have taken place in the past;
  9. Welcomes the widespread condemnation of the attacks by political players and parts of Pakistan's civil society;

10. Calls on the Government of Pakistan to bring to justice those behind the attack on the All Saints Church;
11. Calls on the Government of Pakistan to intervene to protect victims of religiously motivated mob violence as well to actively address religious hostility by societal actors and combat religious intolerance, acts of violence and intimidation and to act against the perception of impunity;
12. Is deeply concerned about the general situation of religious minorities in Pakistan, and in this regard especially about the Christian churches, which have received threats from Taliban and other extremist groups;
13. Expresses its concerns about the fact that the Pakistani blasphemy law, which was publicly opposed by the late Minister Shahbaz Bhatti and by the late Governor Salman Taseer, is still used to persecute religious denominations;
14. Is deeply concerned about the fate of Pastor Saeed Abedini, who has been detained for more than one year and was sentenced to eight years in prison in Iran on charges related to his religious beliefs;
15. Calls on the Iranian authorities to release Pastor Saeed Abedini immediately;
16. Reiterates its call on Iran to take steps to ensure that full respect is shown for the right to freedom of religion or belief, including by ensuring that legislation and practices fully conform to Article 18 of the ICCPR, and points out that this also requires the right of everyone to change his or her religion, if he or she so chooses, to be unconditionally and fully guaranteed;
17. Reiterates its call on the Council, the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission to pay increased attention to the subject of freedom of religion or belief and to the situation of religious communities, including Christians, in agreements and cooperation with third countries as well as in human rights reports;
18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the European External Action Service, the Vice-President of the European Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Secretary-General of the UN, the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Women, the Government of Syria, the Syrian National Council, the Government and Parliament of Pakistan, and the Government and Parliament of Iran.