



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2014 - 2019

Plenary sitting

25.11.2014

B8-0289/2014

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 135 of the Rules of Procedure

on Pakistan: blasphemy laws
(2014/2969(RSP))

Charles Tannock, Mark Demesmaeker, Geoffrey Van Orden, Peter van Dalen, Bas Belder, Arne Gericke, Jana Žitňanská, Ruža Tomašić, Ryszard Czarnecki
on behalf of the ECR Group

B8-0289/2014

**European Parliament resolution on on Pakistan: blasphemy laws
(2014/2969(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Pakistan,
- having regard to Art 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and 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 its resolution of 11 December 2013 on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World and the European Union’s policy on the matter, condemning the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities¹,
- having regard to the EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief²
- having regard to the EU-Pakistan five-year engagement plan of March 2012, containing priorities such as good governance, and dialogue on human rights,
- having regard to the Council conclusions on Pakistan of 11 March 2013, reiterating the EU’s expectations regarding the promotion of and respect for human rights and condemning all violence including against religious minorities³,
- having regard to the statement of 18 October 2014 by the Spokesperson of the European Union External Action Service on the Lahore High Court decision to uphold the conviction of Ms Asia Bibi in Pakistan,
- having regard to the press release of the European Union Delegation to Pakistan of 29 October 2014, on the occasion of the visit by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights to Pakistan from 26 to 29 October 2014,
- having regard to Rule 135(5) of its Rules of Procedure,

¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2f%2fEP%2f%2fTEXT%2bTA%2bP7-TA-2013-0575%2b0%2bDOC%2bXML%2bV0%2f%2fEN&language=EN>

² http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137585.pdf

³ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/135946.pdf

- A. whereas Asia Bibi was arrested in 2009 and sentenced to death in 2010 for blasphemy under Section 295-C of the Pakistani Penal Code; whereas the Lahore High Court on 16 October 2014 dismissed Asia Bibi's appeal and upheld the verdict; whereas the defendant is now preparing an appeal before the Supreme Court, a procedure which may take years;
 - B. whereas on 7 November 2014 a Christian couple, Shama Bibi and Shahbaz Masih, were beaten by a Muslim mob accusing them of burning pages of the Koran in eastern Pakistan; whereas their bodies were incinerated in a brick kiln, with some reports indicating they were still alive when thrown into the kiln;
 - C. Whereas several dozen people, including Muslims, Hindus, Christians and others, are currently in prison on blasphemy charges; whereas to date no death sentence based on blasphemy charges has been carried out, but several accused have been killed by mob violence; whereas there is tremendous pressure from certain religious leaders on the Pakistani court system to uphold and carry out the death sentences, which are usually handed out by lower courts; whereas judicial proceedings often take many years and have a devastating effect on innocent Pakistani citizens and their families and communities;
 - D. whereas Pakistan's blasphemy laws make it dangerous for religious minorities to express themselves freely or engage openly in religious activities; whereas the widespread abuse of these laws are well documented, whereas instead of protecting religious communities they have laid a blanket of fear over the Pakistani society; whereas any attempts to reform the laws or their application has been stifled by threats and assassinations;
 - E. whereas Pakistan plays an important role in fostering stability in South Asia and could be expected to lead by example in strengthening rule of law and human rights;
1. Is deeply concerned and saddened by the decision of the Lahore High Court of 16 October to confirm the death sentence for blasphemy for Asia Bibi; calls on the Supreme Court to swiftly and without delay start its proceedings on the case and in its ruling to uphold the rule of law and the full respect of human rights;
 2. Strongly condemns the murders of Shama Bibi and Shahbaz Masih, and calls for the perpetrators of these acts to be brought to justice; takes note of the decision of the Punjab government to set up a committee to fast track the investigation into their killings and to order additional police protection to Christian neighborhoods in the province; underlines, however, the need to end the climate of impunity and for broader reforms in order to address the issue of violence against religious minorities, which remains pervasive in Pakistan
 3. 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

blasphemy laws, which were publicly opposed by the late Minister Shahbaz Bhatti and by the late Governor Salman Taseer, are increasingly used to target vulnerable minority groups, including Christians, in Pakistan;

4. Calls on the Government of Pakistan to carry out a thorough review of the blasphemy laws and their current application, in particular Sections 295 B and C of the Penal Code, which prescribe mandatory life sentences (295 B and C) or even the death penalty (295 C) for alleged acts of blasphemy, with a view to repealing or at the very least abolish the death penalty for blasphemy or apostasy and to put in place safeguards to prevent abuse of these legal provisions;
5. Calls on the Pakistani authorities to guarantee the independence of the courts, rule of law and due process in line with international standards on judicial proceedings; calls furthermore on the Pakistani authorities to provide sufficient protection to all those involved in blasphemy cases, including by shielding judges from outside pressure, protecting the accused and their families and communities from mob violence and by providing solutions for those who are acquitted but cannot go back to their places of origin;
6. Recalls that freedom of religion and minority rights are guaranteed by Pakistan's constitution; 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;
7. Urges, however, the Pakistani government, to increase efforts for a better inter-religious understanding and to actively address religious hostility by societal actors and combat religious intolerance, acts of violence and intimidation and to act against real or perceived impunity;
8. Strongly condemns all acts of violence against religious communities, as well as all kinds of discrimination and intolerance on the grounds of religion and belief; stresses that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right; stresses furthermore that all Pakistanis irrespective of their faith and religion deserve equal respect, promotion and protection of their human rights;
9. Calls on the EEAS and the Commission to use any tools at their disposal, including as formulated in the EU Guidelines for the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief, to aid religious communities and to pressurize the Pakistani government to do more for the protection of religious minorities; appreciates, in this regard, the recent visit of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and the discussions he held in Pakistan;

10. Calls on the EEAS and the Commission to work with the Pakistani authorities in order to reform the way the blasphemy laws are used, including by implementing the measures suggested under point 5 above;
11. Encourage the Government of Pakistan to work with the UN bodies, including the UN Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, to address valid concerns about human rights problems;
12. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, 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, and the Government and Parliament of Pakistan.