



Plenary sitting

B9-0270/2019

17.12.2019

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 144 of the Rules of Procedure

on violations of human rights including religious freedom in Burkina Faso (2019/2980(RSP))

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on behalf of the PPE Group

B9-0270/2019

European Parliament resolution on violations of human rights including religious freedom in Burkina Faso (2019/2980(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Partnership Agreement between the Members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States, of the other part (the Cotonou Agreement),
- having regard to the UN Security Council report on Joint Forces of the Group of Five (G5) for the Sahel on 11 November 2019,
- having regard to the report by the Inter-Conferences Workshop on Security in the Sahel of November 12-13 2019, and the Message of Bishops, Priests, and Secular Delegates of Episcopal Conferences of Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Ivory Coast, and Ghana,
- having regard to the Statement by the Spokesperson on the attacks in Burkina Faso Brussels, 07 November 2019,
- having regard to the UNHCR Country Operation Update on Burkina Faso from October 2019,
- having regard to the UN Secretary General's statement on attack on a mosque in northern Burkina Faso, 13 October 2019,
- having regard to UNICEF Burkina Faso Humanitarian situation report of 08 October, 2019,
- having regard to the Human Development Report 2019 on Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century, and in particular the report on Burkina Faso,
- having regard to the statement of Bishop Laurent Birfuoré Dabiré of Dori speaking to Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need on 5 July 2019,
- having regard to the visit of High Representative Federica Mogherini to the Sahel region in July 2019, having regard to her speech on 9 July 2019 in Burkina Faso,
- having regard to the Speech on behalf of High Representative Federica Mogherini at the European Parliament plenary debate on the security situation in Burkina Faso, on 17 September 2019,
- having regard to the study published on February 2009 by the Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union entitled "*The Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Freedom of Expression*",

- having regard to the public hearing organized by the subcommittee of Human Rights on 22 November 2017 entitled “*Freedom of religion or belief: the situation of persecuted minorities, notably Christians*”,
 - having regard to the report published on 25 November 2019 from the Special Envoy for the promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief entitled “*The mandate of the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union: activities and recommendations*”,
 - having regard to Rule 144 of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas, since 2015, Jihadist groups that were previously active in neighbouring Mali have terrorized the Burkinabe population and committed a number of attacks against state symbols like military targets, schools and healthcare facilities, but also in particular against churches and Christian worshippers;
 - B. whereas the overall security and humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, as attacks have escalated dramatically since the beginning of 2019 with a total of over 600 victims so far;
 - C. whereas in 2019 over 40 Christians were killed in Burkina Faso in multiple attacks such as most recently the attack on 1 December against a Sunday service at a Protestant church in the Eastern town of Hantoukoura which resulted in 14 casualties;
 - D. whereas several priests and clergymen became victims of targeted assassinations throughout the country, and whereas Jihadist groups are specifically searching for Christians wearing crosses and bibles, and whereas as a result of the increasing violence numerous Christians, in particular in the North, have abandoned their traditional homes, such as most recently the villages of Hitté and Rounga, and fled to IDP camps or other parts of the country;
 - E. whereas Burkina Faso is traditionally tolerant and inclusive for all ethnic and religious groups; whereas the country is suffering from the increased Islamist radicalization in the entire Sahel region;
 - F. whereas jihadist groups want to put a pressure on this interfaith coexistence, as part of their broader strategy to foster interethnic and religious conflicts and generate displacement of the population;
 - G. whereas other religious groups also have been targeted by attacks and whereas 15 people were killed in an attack on a mosque in Salmossi in northern Burkina in October;
 - H. whereas, as a result of the lack of government protection, security measures have been announced by Bishop Justin Kientega of the diocese of Ouahigouya in the northeast of Burkina Faso in order to better protect Christian worshippers;

- I. whereas, on 12 September, the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites was launched by the United Nations Secretary-General Mr. António Guterres;
- J. whereas the government of Burkina Faso lacks the capacity to effectively implement solutions to the enormous security, social and economic challenges, and whereas some regions, in particular in the North-East of the country, are effectively cut off from the control of the central government;
- K. whereas, in December 2018, a state of emergency was declared in the country's northern provinces to combat the increased presence of terrorist organisations;
- L. whereas Burkina Faso's security forces are often suffering from a lack of equipment and proper training and are hence unable to prevent attacks on Christian worshippers and stabilise the country;
- M. whereas, as a result of the violence in August, Bishop Laurent Dabiré of Dori, the president of the bishops' conference of Burkina Faso and Niger, called on the global community to increase their support in order to prevent "*the elimination of the Christian presence*";
- N. whereas mainly faith-based humanitarian organisations play an essential role in helping victims of violence, in particular women and IDPs;
- O. whereas Burkina Faso's population is around two-thirds Muslim and one-third Christian, and whereas the persecution of religious communities, such as a large number of Christian denominations, results in the disruption of the social fabric and the intensification of emigration;
- P. whereas the increasing security threats have a clear impact on the government's ability to meet the basic needs of its people; whereas security issues also affect humanitarian and development efforts carried out by the European Union and the International Community;
- Q. whereas the instability and conflict has led to a loss in sources of income and, combined with climate change, has increased reliance on food aid: Over 1 million people are at risk of a food crisis, and around 150,000 children have been left without an education as affected schools have closed;
- R. whereas 85 health facilities and more than 2,000 schools have been forced to shut down, affecting respectively more than 1 million patients and 300,000 students; whereas 93 other health facilities are at their minimal operational level due to the current dire security situation;
- S. whereas, according to UNICEF, the violence in Burkina Faso has led to the displacement of nearly half a million people; whereas many of them are vulnerable groups including women and children; whereas Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) affected by the humanitarian crisis in the region are subject to protection risks and risks of conflict with the local population over scarce natural resources;

- T. whereas Burkina Faso ranks 182 in the Human Development Index out of 189 countries;
- U. whereas over the last seven years the EU has mobilised more than EUR 1 billion for development programmes in Burkina, and whereas the country is one of the main beneficiaries of financial support from the European Development Fund (EUR 628 million) in addition to substantial support from the EDF funded Emergency Trust Fund (EUR 245.8 million) for the period 2016-2020;
- V. whereas, as a result of the violence in the Sahel region, the G5 Sahel was founded in 2014 and the neighbouring countries, supported by the EU and the international community, have committed to adopting an integrated, strategic framework to synchronise their efforts on security and on development and to identify priority regions for their actions;
- W. whereas the Economic Community Summit of West African States (ECOWAS) in a summit in Ouagadougou on 14 September announced a one-billion-dollar plan to combat rising insecurity in the Sahel region;
1. Strongly condemns any form of violence targeting specific religious communities such as Christians, and the political instrumentalisation and misuse of religion to legitimise persecution of Christians; strongly condemns the pressure put on Christian communities and the several attacks targeting Christians in the country, in particular the North-East regions; calls on the Burkinabe authorities to do everything in their power to bring to justice the perpetrators of terrorist attacks against Christians and other vulnerable population;
 2. Notes with great concern the deteriorating security situation in Burkina Faso and in particular the increasing violence against the Christian minority;
 3. Extends its condolences to the families of the victims and the government of Burkina Faso; expresses its solidarity with the Burkinabe people, who are now being plunged into mourning on an almost daily basis by attacks targeting civilians, security forces, as well as members of Christian communities and other religious minorities;
 4. Welcomes the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites, which was developed by UNAOC and launched by the United Nations Secretary-General Mr. António Guterres on 12 September 2019;
 5. Expresses its gratitude for the important work carried out by NGOs, who are mostly faith-based, and international institutions in providing support to the numerous victims of violence, in particular women and children;
 6. Is strongly concerned by the impact of security threats to the effectiveness of humanitarian and development cooperation;
 7. Calls on the Government of Burkina Faso to increase its support and protection of Christian communities in order to maintain the long-lasting Burkinabe tradition of peaceful co-existence of Islam and Christianity; and calls for additional support for victims of violence, in particular woman;

8. Welcomes the strong assistance by the EU and its Members States to the G5 Sahel and calls on the European Union to further increase its support to the Government of Burkina Faso to tackle the enormous security challenges in the region;
9. Underlines that EU continued security and political assistance for the G5 Sahel-led efforts in the region is imperative, including the peace process in Mali; urges the support for the security forces in Burkina Faso be increased in order to respond to the threats of jihadist attacks and violence, and to support government control in the northern and eastern regions;
10. Calls on the European Union and its partners to continue and expand its humanitarian and development efforts in the entire Sahel region;
11. Recalls that linking political, security and development, also to religious awareness through the promotion of inter-religious dialogue, will be essential in order to find a long-lasting solution to the various challenges faced by Burkina Faso and the Sahel region and in this light welcomes initiatives by regional organisations like ECOWAS to work for the stabilisation of the Sahel region and calls for further efforts in this regard;
12. Calls for the European External Action Service to include the good practices of interreligious dialogue as a tool in their communication strategy towards third countries and to foster mediation in conflict situations for the protection of religious minorities and the freedom of religion and belief;
13. Points to the fact that the international community needs to take decisive measures to end international terrorist financing and cross boarder transfers of weapons;
14. Reminds the Government of Burkina Faso that the fight against corruption and eradicating impunity remain important and should be made priority as they are the negative factors that push individuals to the extreme;
15. Call for the Government of Burkina Faso to unite all its forces (political, economic, social, traditional, religious) in the fight for the liberation of its territory, including negotiating a moratorium with trade union forces to focus on the fight against terrorism, but also to invite all citizens in exiles to return to help advance the country;
16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the President of the Republic of Burkina Faso, the Speaker of the Burkinabe Parliament and the African Union and its institutions.