

**Question for written answer E-9220/2010
to the Commission**
Rule 117
Konrad Szymański (ECR)

Subject: Persecution of Filipino Catholics in Saudi Arabia

A Catholic priest and 12 practising Catholics from the Philippines have been arrested in Saudi Arabia whilst celebrating the Eucharist. The arrests took place on 1 October 2010 in a hotel in the capital, Riyadh. The Saudi authorities have justified the arrests by pointing out that although small-scale meetings of Christians are tolerated under Saudi law, larger gatherings are not. It looks as though Filipino diplomats have managed to negotiate terms for the release of the accused. No sentence has yet been handed down in the case.

Saudi Arabia is home to almost one million Filipino Catholics. They are practically completely banned from practicing their religion. They are often the victims of religiously motivated abuse and crime – exploitation, abuse in the workplace and violence. For many years now, the Catholic Church has been seeking authorisation to build churches in Saudi Arabia, pointing out to the authorities that mosques are freely built in European countries, and that immigrants are free to practice Islam.

The above examples show that human rights are being breached in Saudi Arabia, in particular the freedom of religious belief and affiliation as enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the European Convention on Human Rights.

Is the Commission intending to take any action on this matter? In particular, is the Commission intending to make official representations in relation to this case and other similar cases?

How will the Commission be taking this issue into account in the context of its external relations policy involving Saudi Arabia?