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Plenary sitting

8.10.2013

B7-0451/2013

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 EFD Group

B7-0451/2013

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 resolutions of 20 May 2010 on religious freedom in Pakistan, of 20 January 2011 on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion, of 27 October 2011 on the situation in Egypt and Syria, in particular of Christian communities, and of 14 June 2012 on the situation of ethnic minorities in Iran,
- Having regard to the statement by the spokesperson of EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on case of Youcef Nadarkhani, 24 February 2012,
- Having regard to the statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton condemning the attack on the Christian community in Peshawar, Pakistan, 23 September 2013,
- Having regard to the UN Special Rapporteur's March 2013 report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran,
- Having regard to the Open Doors International Vulnerability Assessment of Syria's Christians,
- Having regard to its resolution of 18 April 2012 on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World and the European Union's policy on the matter, including implications for the EU's strategic human rights policy (2011/2185(INI)),
- Having regard to the Council Conclusions on intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion or belief, as adopted at the 3069th Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Brussels on 21 February 2011,
- Having regard to its statement delivered on 11 March 2013 by the spokesman for the European Union's Permanent Delegation to the United Nations in Geneva,
- Having regard to Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- Having regard to Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
- Having regard to Rule 122 of its Rules of Procedure,

Syria

- A. Whereas Maaloula, an historic Christian village in Syria, has experienced violent clashes between rebels and the government army, after Jahbat-al-Nusra, Ahrar-al-Sham and Qalamoun Liberation Front attacked the village in the morning of 4 September 2013;
- B. Whereas reportedly at least three churches were seriously damaged during the fighting;
- C. Whereas a number of Christians have been killed in the attack and around 3,000 villagers, both Muslims and Christians, have been forced to move to safer regions in Syria;
- D. whereas the government forces regained control over Maaloula a few days after the attack;
- E. Whereas the events in Maaloula do not stand alone, as Syrian villages get regularly attacked by rebel groups in order to 'free' them, but in practice resulting in the suppression of the local population, kidnappings, rape, the execution of 'betrayers', extortion, damaging of property, looting of houses and Islamic dress code for Christian girls; whereas some Christians for this reason decided to become Muslim in order to prevent further suffering;
- F. Whereas, according to the Open Doors International Vulnerability Assessment of Syria's Christians, Syria's Christians are a particularly vulnerable religious and ethnic minority, who occasionally suffer deliberate attacks;

Pakistan

- G. Whereas at least 80 people were killed and over 120 were wounded as a result of a double suicide bombing attack, which was carried out by Jandullah (a militant group linked to the Pakistani Taliban) that took place outside the All Saints Church in Peshawar, Pakistan on 22 September 2013;
- H. Whereas Christians represent about 1.6 % of the population in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan;
- I. Whereas religious minorities in Pakistan feel vulnerable to militant attacks, caught between Islamic militant organisations, an Islamising culture and a weak government, with a military complicit in fuelling Islamic militants; whereas recent years have seen increasing sectarian violence between Shias and Sunnis, as well as outbreaks of communal violence in areas where Muslims and Christians live side by side;
- J. Whereas the government in Pakistan seems to be unable to prevent this kind of attacks against religious minorities;

Iran

- K. Whereas in September 2012, Saeed Abedini, a minority Christian with dual Iranian-American citizenship, was arbitrarily detained, held in solitary confinement, beaten, denied access to medical treatment necessary as result of such beatings, and denied access to his lawyer until less than twenty-four hours before his trial;
- L. Whereas in January 2013, an Iranian court accused Saeed Abedini of attempting to undermine the national security of Iran by creating a network of Christian churches in private homes;
- M. Whereas in the same month, Saeed Abedini was tried in a non-public trial before an impartial judge who has been sanctioned by the European Union for his repeated violations of human rights; whereas during his trial Saeed Abedini and his lawyer were barred from attending portions of the trial in which the government took evidence through witness testimony;
- N. Whereas in August 2013, the 36th Branch of the Tehran Appeals Court denied Saeed Abedini's appeal and affirmed his eight-year sentence;
- O. Whereas the Iranian government continues to indefinitely imprison Saeed Abedini for peacefully exercising his faith; whereas numerous Iranian government officials have used physical and psychological abuse against Saeed Abedini;
- P. Whereas Iran is a member of the United Nations and signatory to both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights without reservation;
- Q. Whereas articles 23 through 27 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran provide for freedom of expression, assembly, and association, as well as the freedom to practice one's religion;
- R. Whereas the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights uphold that every individual shall have "the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion," which includes the "freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance";
- S. Whereas the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights upholds that every individual shall be free from arbitrary arrest and detention, and that every individual bears the right to have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defense and to be present during the duration of his trial; whereas the covenant guarantees every individual the right to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent, and impartial tribunal;
- T. Whereas Iran is a religiously diverse society and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran reports that

religious minorities including Nematullahi Sufi Muslims, Sunnis, Baha'is, and Christians face human rights violations in Iran; whereas the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights reports that Iranian intelligence officials are known to threaten Christian converts with arrest and apostasy charges if they do not return to Islam;

- U. Whereas, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of incidents of Iranian authorities raiding religious services, detaining worshippers and religious leaders, and harassing and threatening minority religious members;
 - V. Whereas freedom of religious belief and practice is a universal human right and a fundamental freedom of every individual, regardless of race, sex, country, creed, or nationality, and should never be arbitrarily abridged by any government;
 - W. Whereas governments have a responsibility to protect the fundamental rights of their citizens and to pursue justice for all;
1. Reconfirms that religious freedom is a sacred, inalienable, and universal human fundamental right, recognized by international and European instruments;

Syria

2. Condemns the persecution and massacre of Christians and Alawites, the destruction of hundreds of churches, looting of houses, extortion and the kidnappings, rapes, murders and forced conversions in Syria;
3. Condemns the attack on the Syrian Christian village of Maaloula by rebel groups, amongst which jihadists, resulting in several deaths, damaged buildings and an alarming amount of displaced people;
4. Calls for humanitarian assistance for all those in need in Syria, with special regard to the wounded, refugees, internally displaced persons, women and children;
5. Calls for the EU and national governments to take appropriate, responsible measures of preparedness in response to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria;

Pakistan

6. Deeply regrets the attack on the All Saints Church in Peshawar, Pakistan;
7. Condolences the relatives of those who have been killed during the bloody attacks;
8. Urges the Pakistani Government to take responsibility to protect religious minorities and to seriously tackle the increasing religious and sectarian intolerance in the country;
9. Urges the Pakistani government to abolish its strict blasphemy laws;

Iran

10. Is deeply concerned regarding the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran's state-sponsored persecution of religious minorities;
11. Is deeply concerned regarding the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran's continued persecution, imprisonment, and sentencing of Saeed Abedini on the charge of attempting to undermine state security by creating a network of Christian churches in private homes;
12. Calls on the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to exonerate and immediately release Saeed Abedini and all other individuals held or charged on account of their religion;
13. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the Governments and Parliaments of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.