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Situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion

European Parliament resolution of 20 January 2011 on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions, and in particular that 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,
 - having regard to its annual reports on the situation of human rights in the world, and in particular to its resolution of 16 December 2010 on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2009,
 - 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 and in particular her reports of 29 December 2009, 16 February 2010 and 29 July 2010,
 - having regard to Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights of 1950,
 - having regard to Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
 - having regard to Article 3(5) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
 - having regard to Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
 - having regard to the statement by the spokesperson of Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission, following the attack against worshippers at a Coptic Church in Alexandria, Egypt, on 1 January 2011,
 - having regard to the statement of the President of the European Parliament Jerzy Buzek on the deadly blast at an Egyptian church on 1 January 2011,
 - having regard to Rule 110(4) 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 Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights declares that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; whereas this right includes the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of one's own choice, and the freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest this religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching,
- C. whereas freedom of thought, conscience and religion applies to adherents of religions, but also to atheists, agnostics and people without beliefs,
- D. whereas the number of attacks on Christian communities has risen worldwide in 2010 as well as the number of trials and sentences to death for blasphemy, which often affect women; whereas statistics on religious freedom in recent years show that the majority of acts of religious violence are perpetrated against Christians, as indicated in the 2009 Report on Religious Freedom in the World prepared by the organisation 'Aid to the Church in Need'; whereas in some cases the situation facing Christian communities 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,
- E. whereas once again innocent lives were being cut short in atrocious attacks designed to strike the Christian community in Nigeria on 11 January 2011; whereas on 24 December 2010 there were attacks against several churches in Maiduguri and on 25 December there were bomb attacks in the Nigerian city of Jos, which led to the killing of 38 civilians while dozens of others were wounded; whereas on 21 December 2010 men armed with swords and machetes assaulted a group of local Christian villagers, killing three and leaving two wounded, in Turu, Nigeria; whereas on 3 December 2010 seven Christians, including women and children, were found dead, whilst four others were left wounded in a attack in the city of Jos, Nigeria,
- F. whereas the assassination of Salmaan Taseer, Governor of Punjab, on 4 January 2011 as well as the case of Asia Noreen in Pakistan provoked protests by the international community,
- G. whereas a terrorist attack on Coptic Christians killed and injured innocent civilians in Alexandria on 1 January 2011,
- H. whereas on 25 December 2010 a priest and a 9-year-old girl were among the total number of 11 wounded when a bomb was set off inside a chapel on Christmas Day, in Sulu, Philippines,
- I. whereas the celebration of Christmas Mass in the villages of Rizokarpaso and Ayia Triada in the northern part of Cyprus was interrupted by force on 25 December 2010,
- J. whereas on 30 December 2010 jihadi terrorist attacks against Assyrian Christian families left at least two dead and 14 wounded in a series of coordinated bomb attacks on Christian homes in Baghdad, Iraq; whereas on 27 December 2010 a roadside bomb killed an Assyrian

Christian woman and wounded her husband in Dujail, Iraq; whereas two Iraqi Christians were killed in Mosul on 22 November 2010; whereas a series of attacks targeting Christian areas killed innocent civilians in Baghdad on 10 November 2010; whereas 52 people died, amongst them women and children, in the massacre of 1 November 2010 at the Syrian Catholic Church of Our Lady of Deliverance in Baghdad,

- K. whereas the Iranian Government has stepped up its campaign against Christians in the Islamic Republic, with more than 100 arrested in the past month, forcing many to flee the country or face criminal charges and a possible death sentence,
- L. whereas in Vietnam too, the activities of the Catholic Church and of other religious communities have been severely repressed, as is demonstrated by the serious situation facing the communities of Vietnamese ‘montagnards’; whereas, however, the change of heart by the Vietnamese regime concerning the case of Father Nguyen Van Ly, resulting in his release, can be welcomed,
- M. whereas attacks by violent Islamist extremists are also attacks on the current regime of the states concerned, aiming to create unrest and to start civil war between the different religious groups,
- N. whereas Europe, like other parts of the world, is not exempt from cases of violation of freedom of religion, attacks on members of religious minorities on the basis of their beliefs, and religiously motivated discrimination,
- O. whereas inter-community dialogue is crucial to promoting peace and mutual understanding between peoples,
 - 1. Condemns the recent attacks on Christian communities in various countries and expresses its solidarity with the families of the victims; expresses 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;
 - 2. Welcomes the efforts made by the authorities of the countries concerned to identify the authors and perpetrators of the attacks on Christian communities; 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 or other minorities, are brought to justice and tried by due process;
 - 3. Strongly condemns all acts of violence against Christians and other religious communities as well as all kinds of discrimination and intolerance based on religion and belief against religious people, apostates and non-believers; stresses once again that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right;
 - 4. Is concerned about the exodus of Christians from various countries, especially Middle Eastern countries, in recent years;
 - 5. Expresses its concerns about the fact that the Pakistani blasphemy law, which was publicly opposed by the late Governor Salman Taseer, is still used to persecute religious denominations, including Christians such as Asia Noreen, a Christian mother of five sentenced to death, and that the murderer of Governor Salman Taseer is treated by large sections of Pakistani society as a hero;

6. Welcomes the Egyptian public opinion reaction which vigorously condemned the terrorist act and rapidly grasped that the attack was plotted to undermine the deep rooted traditional bonds between Christians and Muslims in Egypt; welcomes the joint demonstrations by Coptic Christians and Muslims in Egypt to protest against the attack; welcomes also the public condemnation of the attack by the President of Egypt Hosni Mubarak, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar and the Grand Mufti of Egypt;
7. Condemns the interruption by force of the Christmas Mass celebrated on Christmas Day by the remaining 300 Christians in the northern part of Cyprus by the Turkish authorities;
8. Expresses its grave concerns about the abuse of religion by the perpetrators of terrorist acts in several areas of the world; denounces the instrumentalisation of religion in various political conflicts;
9. Urges the authorities of states with alarmingly high levels of attacks against religious denominations to take responsibility in ensuring normal and public religious practices for all religious denominations, to step up their efforts to provide reliable and efficient protection for the religious denominations in their countries and to ensure the personal safety and physical integrity of members of religious denominations in the country, thereby complying with the obligations to which they have already committed themselves within the international arena;
10. Stresses once again that respect for human rights and civil liberties, including freedom of religion or belief, are fundamental principles and aims of the European Union and constitute a common ground in its relations with third countries;
11. Calls 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;
12. Invites the forthcoming External Affairs Council on 31 January 2011 to discuss the question of the persecution of Christians and respect for religious freedom or belief, which discussion should give rise to concrete results, especially as regards the instruments that can be used to provide security and protection for Christian communities under threat, wherever in the world they may be;
13. Calls on the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission to develop as a matter of urgency an EU strategy on the enforcement of the human right to freedom of religion, including a list of measures against states who knowingly fail to protect religious denominations;
14. Asks the High Representative, in light of recent events and the increasing necessity for analysing and understanding the evolution of cultural and religious developments in international relations and contemporary societies, to develop a permanent capacity within the human rights directorate of the European External Action Service to monitor the situation of governmental and societal restrictions on religious freedom and related rights, and to report annually to Parliament;
15. Calls for the Council, the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign

Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission and Parliament to include a chapter on religious freedom in their Annual Human Rights report;

16. Urges EU institutions to comply with the obligation under Article 17 of the TFEU to maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with churches and religious, philosophical and non-confessional organisations, in order to ensure that the issue of the persecution of Christians and other religious communities is a priority issue which is discussed on a systematic basis;
17. Calls on the leadership of all religious communities in Europe to condemn attacks on Christian communities and other faith groups on the basis of equal respect for each denomination;
18. Reiterates its support for all initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue and mutual respect between religious and other communities; calls on all religious authorities to promote tolerance and to take initiatives against hatred and violent and extremist radicalisation;
19. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission, the parliaments and governments of the Member States, the parliament and government of Egypt, the parliament and government of Iran, the parliament and government of Iraq, the parliament and government of Nigeria, the parliament and government of Pakistan, the parliament and government of the Philippines, the parliament and government of Vietnam, and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.