

Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2007/2020(INI)	Procedure completed
Annual report on human rights in the world 2006 and the EU's policy on this matter		
Subject 6.10.09 Human rights situation in the world		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	AFET Foreign Affairs	PPE-DE COVENEY Simon	28/11/2006
European Commission	Commission DG External Relations	Commissioner ALMUNIA Joaquín	

Key events			
12/02/2007	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
27/03/2007	Vote in committee		Summary
10/04/2007	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0128/2007	
25/04/2007	Debate in Parliament		
26/04/2007	Results of vote in Parliament		
26/04/2007	Decision by Parliament	T6-0165/2007	Summary
26/04/2007	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2007/2020(INI)
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Procedure subtype	Annual report
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP P.F.
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	AFET/6/45355

Documentation gateway					
Committee draft report		PE384.496	05/02/2007	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE386.490	13/03/2007	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0128/2007	10/04/2007	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0165/2007	26/04/2007	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2007)2625/2	31/05/2007	EC	

Annual report on human rights in the world 2006 and the EU's policy on this matter

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Simon COVENEY (EPP-ED, IE) on the EU's 2006 Annual Report on Human Rights. It singled out a number of countries for particular criticism, including China, Iran, Russia and Sudan.

The committee said that China's human rights record was still a matter of "serious concern" and should thus "receive more focus in the build-up to the Beijing Olympic games". MEPs urged the Council and Commission to raise the issue of Tibet in talks with the Beijing government, and added that the EU's trade relations with Beijing should be contingent upon human rights reform.

Expressing its "deep concern regarding the deterioration of the human rights situation" in Iran, the committee "calls on the Council to express concern [...] in all its contacts with the Iranian government". It also called on the Commission to use the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) to promote cooperation with Iranian civil society.

The report strongly criticised the Russian government, regretting that the EU had had only "limited success" in bringing about policy change as a result of raising difficult issues - such as the situation in Chechnya, the treatment of human rights defenders, and freedom of expression. It expressed concern at legislation limiting the activities of NGOs. The committee was "appalled" at the murder of Anna Politkovskaya and said that Russia should take further measures "to protect freedom of expression and the security of journalists". It also expressed concern about allegations surrounding the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko and the mistreatment of Mikhail Khodorkovsky in prison. The Commission and Council were urged to raise such cases with the Russian authorities at the highest level and in the new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia.

On Darfur, the report regretted the fact that the EU had not taken more unilateral action regarding the crisis and had not tried harder to persuade the Sudanese government to accept an international peacekeeping force. It urged the EU to back an international peacekeeping force and the enforcement of the no-fly zone over Darfur. It said that the Council should agree "a plan of specific, targeted sanctions to be imposed on the Khartoum regime [...] in the event of non-compliance with the demands of the international community."

Among other points, the report also recognised attempts to set up a human rights dialogue with Uzbekistan, but said that such a dialogue should not automatically "lead to the lifting of sanctions [...] if no progress is made in the area of human rights and democracy". It also expressed concern about the "limited progress" on human rights issues in Turkey and encouraged the Ankara government to change Article 301 of the country's Penal Code, which limits freedom of expression in the media.

MEPs called for the adoption of "more effective and targeted sanctions" against the government of Myanmar in the light of the deteriorating human rights situation in the country. They also proposed the "expansion of the temporary international mechanism and a continuing proactive search for a satisfactory context for a resumption of direct aid" to the Palestinian territories.

Other countries were also put in the spotlight in the committee's report. The Commission was urged to "review its policy tools vis-à-vis Libya" in view of Tripoli's failure to ensure a fair trial for five Bulgarian nurses and one Palestinian doctor accused of intentionally infecting children with the AIDS virus. The Council and Commission should urge the US government to "find a mechanism that will facilitate the charging or releasing of detainees in accordance with international law". They should also express "strong disapproval" of US efforts "to actively prevent other countries from ratifying" the Rome Statute of the ICC. The Czech Republic, "as the only remaining EU Member State not to have ratified the Statute", was urged to do so without delay.

The report was also critical of some EU activity in the area of human rights. It asked the Council to explain "how it was possible for Belarus to be elected onto the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in June 2005? ? this, in spite of the fact that ?four major EU countries are permanent members of that Governing Body.? It also noted "with total stupefaction" the provisional suspension by ECHO of humanitarian aid for Iraq, despite "the disastrous situation afflicting the suffering Iraqi people and Iraqi refugees."

On immigration, the committee noted that the Union, in its texts, attempts "to link immigration and development and ensure that the fundamental rights of immigrants are respected?". However, "the reality on the ground gives the lie to those texts": readmission agreements are being concluded with third countries that do not have the legal and institutional machinery needed in order to handle the readmission of nationals and protect their rights.

MEPs noted that although the new United Nations Human Rights Council "has the potential to develop into a valuable framework for the EU's multilateral human rights efforts", it had proved to be ineffectual in responding appropriately to human rights crises due to "the use of the UNHRC by many states as a forum for political pressure instead of the promotion of human rights". The Member States were urged not to support countries which have been shown to commit "gross and systematic" human rights violations as candidates for high-ranking positions in international forums.

The report also included a series of recommendations to the Council and Commission. It urged both institutions to raise the situation of human rights defenders systematically in all political dialogues. EU missions should "reach out to local human rights defenders in a more proactive manner", and the Council was urged "to inform Parliament systematically about the implementation of the guidelines on the ground and to

involve it fully in the process of evaluating them". The committee said that the idea of issuing visas for human rights defenders in grave danger, as recommended by the Council, should be "an important priority". Lastly, future Council presidencies were asked to report back to Parliament on how its concerns, as expressed in its resolutions, have been taken into account.

Annual report on human rights in the world 2006 and the EU's policy on this matter

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report by Simon COVENEY (EPP-ED, IE) on the EU's 2006 Annual Report on Human Rights. It singled out a number of countries for particular criticism, including China, Iran, Russia and Sudan. The EU and its institutions did not escape criticism. The resolution sets out to examine, evaluate and, in specific cases, offer constructive criticism of the human rights activities of the Commission and the Council and of the overall activities of Parliament, in particular by drawing attention to issues neglected in those activities.

In its opening remarks, Parliament considered that greater priority needed to be given to improving the ability of the EU to respond to human rights breaches by third countries, not least by mainstreaming human rights policy with respect to EU policies vis-à-vis such countries, including the external impact of EU internal policies. It emphasised the need for a consistent policy implemented by all EU Member States in their bilateral relations with third countries where human rights are frequently violated and asked Member States to conduct their bilateral contacts with those countries in a manner consistent with EU policy.

With regard to the EU Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2006, Parliament felt that it was a positive development that the report endeavoured to do justice to the activities of the European Parliament, but asked again that future Presidencies report in the EU Annual Reports on the ways in which Parliament's resolutions - including urgency resolutions on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law - have been taken into account by the Council and the Commission. It also asked the Council and the Commission to analyse the ways in which human rights are dealt with in other EU policies, such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and the policies on development and trade and immigration. Parliament advocated, too the adoption of an overall list of "countries of particular concern" with respect to human rights violations in the context of their Annual Report each year.

Parliament regretted that the new UNHRC has proven to be ineffectual in responding appropriately to human rights crises around the world due to the use of the UNHRC by many states as a forum for political pressure instead of the promotion of human rights. It also expressed its disappointment at the weakness of the UNHRC resolution on Darfur, deploring the fact that the UNHRC delegation was prevented from entering Sudan by not being granted visas by the authorities. Parliament also expressed its concern at the effect on the ordinary Palestinian people of the EU decision to suspend the provision of aid through the Palestinian Authority, as a result of the failure of the Authority to fulfil legitimate conditions.

It asked the Council to explain how it was possible for Belarus to be elected onto the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in June 2005 when four major EU countries are permanent members of that Governing Body, and whether the Council considered opposing Belarus' membership.

The Council and the Commission were asked to use all available mechanisms to encourage the US to sign the Rome Statute and also to express strong disapproval of US efforts actively to prevent other countries from ratifying the Statute and from proposing to third countries parallel agreements such as bilateral exemption treaties.

The Commission must ensure that its staff, in particular those working in the field of development policy, are sufficiently aware of the human rights guidelines. Parliament commended the German Presidency's commitment to establish EU human rights guidelines on the rights of the child. In addition, full implementation of the 2004 EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders must be prioritised.

Parliament emphasised the need to strengthen the EU-China human rights dialogue considerably. It stressed that China's human rights record remained a matter of serious concern. Despite significant economic reforms, political and human rights concerns still persist regarding such matters as political imprisonment, forced labour, freedom of expression and religion, rights of religious and ethnic minorities, the Laogai camp system and allegations of organ harvesting. Such concerns should receive more focus in the build-up to the Beijing Olympic games. Parliament urged the EU to ensure that its trading relationship with China is contingent upon human rights reforms. The Council and the Commission must raise the issue of Tibet and actively support the strengthening of the dialogue between the Chinese Government and the Dalai Lama. Parliament was very concerned about the deterioration of the human rights situation in Iran, and about the fact that the human rights dialogue with Iran had been interrupted since 2004 due to a lack of cooperation from Iran. The Commission was asked to implement all actions required within the framework of the EIDHR, so as to promote contacts with Iranian civil society and to further support democracy and human rights.

With regard to Russia, Parliament regretted that the EU had had only limited success in bringing about policy change as a result of raising difficult issues. These include the situation in Chechnya, impunity and the independence of the judiciary, the treatment of human rights defenders, the independence of the media and freedom of expression, and the treatment of ethnic minorities. It repeated concerns about Russian legislation limiting the activities of NGOs, and remained appalled at the murder of Anna Politkovskaja, and referred to the allegations that the Russian government was behind the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko, who died in November 2006 in London.

It moved on to express concern about the limited progress achieved to date and the need for greater focus on human rights issues in Turkey, especially as regards freedom of religion for all religious communities and full enjoyment of their property rights, protection of minorities, freedom of expression and human rights concerns relating to the population of Kurdish origin in the south-east of the country.

Parliament made recommendations with regard to the situation in Burma/Myanmar, and urged the Commission to review its policy tools vis-à-vis Libya. On Iraq, Parliament noted with total stupefaction the provisional suspension by ECHO of humanitarian aid for Iraq, notwithstanding the disastrous situation afflicting the suffering Iraqi people and Iraqi refugees. However, it welcomed the resumption of this aid from February 2007.

It was deplorable that the violence in Darfur has continued unchecked, and that the Sudanese government has not been held accountable for its repeated failures to comply with international demands and protect its citizens from violence. While welcoming the recent indictments issued by the ICC, Parliament regretted that the EU had not taken more unilateral action regarding the crisis in Darfur and had not tried harder to persuade the government of Sudan to accept an international peacekeeping force. The Council was urged to agree a plan of specific,

targeted sanctions to be imposed on the Khartoum regime, in accordance with a clear timetable, in the event of non-compliance with the demands of the international community. The EU should contribute (and to put pressure on others to also contribute) to an international peacekeeping force and the enforcement of the no-fly zone over Darfur, and ensure that the African Union is adequately resourced and assisted to fulfil its mandate. Parliament implored the Member States, the Council and the Commission to assume their responsibilities and to provide effective protection for the people of Darfur from a humanitarian disaster.

With regard to the implementation of human rights and democracy clauses in external agreements, Parliament was concerned by the recent Commission proposal to exempt India from the rule that all EU agreements must include a human rights and democracy clause, in the context of the negotiations for the EU-India Free Trade Agreement. Such a move would be a retrograde step and could set a worrying precedent for future negotiations on trade agreements.

Parliament moved to point out that numerous internal policies, particularly those relating to asylum, immigration and anti-terrorist measures, were having a major impact on respect for human rights in third countries. Greater efforts must be made to ensure that the internal policies in question comply with human rights and international humanitarian law. There was particular disquiet at the fact that agreements for the readmission of illegal immigrants were being concluded with third countries that did not have the legal and institutional machinery needed in order to handle the readmission of nationals and protect their rights. Any migration policy has to be a common policy and, above all, preventive rather than punitive.

Lastly, Parliament examined its own effectiveness in its interventions in human rights cases. It made numerous recommendations with regard to mainstreaming and to the work of its committees, and welcomed the contribution it had made to raising the profile of Guantánamo and its human rights concerns relating to it. The very existence of the Guantánamo Bay detention centre continues to send out a negative signal as to how the fight against terrorism is being pursued.