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DRAFT REPORT

on the persecution of minorities on the grounds of belief or religion
(2021/2055(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Karol Karski

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

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The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 2, 18 and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),
- having regard to Articles 2, 4, 18, 24, 26 and 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),
- having regard to Articles 2 and 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,
- having regard to Articles 6 and 21 of the Treaty on European Union,
- having regard to Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to Articles 10, 14, 21 and 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, to Article 2 of the First Protocol thereto, and to Article 12 of Protocol No. 12 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,
- having regard to the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,
- having regard to the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),
- having regard to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court
- having regard to the Declaration of 25 November 1981 of the UN General Assembly on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Belief or religion,
- having regard to the Declaration of 18 December 1992 of the UN General Assembly on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities,
- having regard to resolution 16/18 of 24 March 2011 of the UN Human Rights Council on combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatisation of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief,

- having regard to the Rabat Plan of Action of 5 October 2012, on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence,
- having regard to the decision of the UN General Assembly designating 22 August as the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Belief or religion, adopted on 28 May 2019,
- having regard to the reports of 19 July 2019 and 3 March 2021 of the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues to the UN Human Rights Council, addressing in particular respectively the concept of a minority and the widespread targeting of minorities through hate speech in social media,
- having regard to the report of 12 October 2020 of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, addressing the importance of safeguarding freedom of religion or belief for all for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and how persons belonging to religious or belief minorities are at risk of ‘being left behind’,
- having regard to the annual report of 28 December 2020 of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities,
- having regard to the Marrakesh Declaration of 27 January 2016 on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 16 November 2009 on freedom of religion or belief,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 21 February 2011 on intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion or belief,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 22 February 2021 on EU priorities in UN Human Rights Fora in 2021,
- having regard to the EU Guidelines of 24 June 2013 on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief,
- having regard to the EU Guidelines of 18 March 2019 on non-discrimination in external action,
- having regard to the reports from the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU,
- having regard to the 2020-24 EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, to be funded under the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework,
- having regard to the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (COM/2018/0460), and to the amended proposal thereon (COM/2020/0459),

- having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2019 on EU Guidelines and the mandate of the EU Special Envoy on the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 4 February 2016 on the systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called ‘ISIS/Daesh’²,
 - having regard to its resolutions of 7 July³ and 15 December 2016⁴, 14 September⁵ and 14 December 2017⁶, and 19 September 2019⁷ on Myanmar and the situation of the Rohingya people,
 - having regard to its resolution of 19 December 2019 on violations of human rights including religious freedoms in Burkina Faso⁸,
 - having regard to its resolution of 29 April 2021 on blasphemy laws in Pakistan, in particular the case of Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel⁹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2020 on the annual report 2018 on the human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter¹⁰, in particular paragraphs 42, 43 and 45 thereof,
 - having regard to its resolution of 20 January 2021 on human rights and democracy in the world and the EU’s policy on the matter – annual report 2019¹¹, in particular paragraphs 103, 104, 106 and 107 thereof,
 - having regard to the activities of the European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0000/2021),
- A. whereas UN human rights treaties, together with international and EU laws provide standards for the protection of the rights of persons belonging to religious minorities as an integral part of human rights;
- B. whereas freedom of religion or belief is violated in almost one third of countries worldwide; whereas over 5 billion people live in countries imposing or tolerating severe violations of freedom of religious or belief;
- C. whereas discrimination and persecution of religious is carried out by different actors –

¹ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2019)0013.

² OJ C 35, 31.1.2018, p. 77.

³ OJ C 101, 16.3.2018, p. 134.

⁴ OJ C 238, 6.7.2018, p. 112.

⁵ OJ C 337, 20.9.2018, p. 109.

⁶ OJ C 369, 11.10.2018, p. 91.

⁷ OJ C 171, 6.5.21, p.12.

⁸ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2019)0106.

⁹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2021)0157.

¹⁰ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0007.

¹¹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2021)00014.

whether governments or other groups in society – and can take different forms, such as killings, physical attacks, arbitrary arrests, coercion, forced conversion, kidnapping and forced marriage, forced birth control, threats, exclusion, discriminatory and unfair treatment, harassment, limitation of access to elective offices, employment, education, health and administration services, destruction of places of worship, cemeteries and cultural heritage, and online hate speech;

- D. whereas in 2018 Asia and the Pacific experienced the largest increase in government restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, while the Middle East and North Africa continued to have the highest median level of restrictions;
- E. whereas in 2018, Christians were harassed in 145 countries, Muslims in 139, Jews in 88, Buddhists in 24, Hindus in 19 countries and non-believers in 18 countries¹²;
1. Affirms its unwavering commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of persons belonging to religious minorities everywhere in the world, including their right to change or choose their religion or belief, in respect of the principles of equality and non-discrimination; condemns in the strongest terms all persecution, violence, incitement to violence and terrorism targeting any minority on the grounds of religion and belief;
 2. Takes the view that, regardless of their religion and belief, it is essential to promote and ensure the inclusion of all citizens in their societies and in political and cultural life;
 3. Stresses that freedom of religion or belief, including freedom to worship, and freedom to believe or not believe, is a human right, and that it often serves as a last bastion of liberty and as a source of fierce determination in highly repressive settings;
 4. Is deeply concerned about the rise over the last decade of violence against people belonging to minorities on the grounds of their belief or religion as a global phenomenon, which is intensifying and affecting more and more countries; notes that it affects many religious communities, namely Christians (including Copts), Jews, Muslims (including Ahmadis and Alevis), Buddhists, Hindus and smaller religious groups, such as Baha'is, Sikhs and Zoroastrians, as well as groups of people who are atheists, humanists, agnostics or do not identify with any religion;
 5. Stresses that among believers' groups, Christians are estimated to constitute the majority of people facing persecution for their faith; underlines that globally around 340 million Christians experience high levels of persecution and discrimination, with over 4 500 Christians killed for their faith, 4 500 churches and other Christian buildings attacked, and over 4 200 believers detained without trial, arrested, sentenced or imprisoned in 2020 alone; is alarmed about the increase in the overall level of discrimination, and especially about the sharp increase in the number of killings compared to 2019;
 6. Is concerned about the persecution and serious human rights violations against Muslim minorities;

¹² According to [data](#) collected by the Pew Research Center (10 November 2020).

7. Is worried about growing antisemitism worldwide, given that although Jews make up only 0.2 % of the global population, they faced harassment in 88 countries in 2018;
8. Emphasises that the perpetrators of acts of persecution include authoritarian regimes, governments inclined to impose the supremacy of dominant ethnic or religious populations over minorities, terrorist organisations, political and religious extremist parties or groups, and also, sometimes, family members, friends and neighbours of victims, for instance when the latter change or abandon their religious allegiance;

The Middle East and North Africa

9. Notes with particular concern that persecution of Christians is widespread in the Middle East, at times amounting to genocide, and has prompted an exodus of Christians from the region over the past two decades, resulting in approximately 15 million Christians making up 4 % of the population in the Middle East and North Africa, down from 20 % a century ago;
10. Strongly deplores that millions of Christians have been uprooted from their homes, and that many have been killed, kidnapped, imprisoned, discriminated against and have had restrictions placed on their freedom of worship; notes that forms of persecution also exist in all aspects of social life, including in employment and education;
11. Recalls the crimes against humanity and war crimes were committed in Iraq and Syria by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' against Christians, Yazidis, Muslims and other religious and ethnic minorities in the territories under its control during the period 2014-2020;
12. Underlines that the persecution of minority Muslim denominations or sects is widespread in the countries in the Middle East and North Africa in which Islam is the predominant or official religion;
13. Notes with particular concern that the Middle East and North Africa present the highest regional levels of anti-Semitic attitudes, and that Holocaust denial is prevalent among certain segments in society and even at state level, such as in Iran;
14. Is concerned about the persecution of Baha'is in the Middle East; strongly condemns the restrictions imposed on the Baha'i community by the Houthis in Yemen, the expulsion of community members from Qatar and the continued systematic arrests, imprisonment, torture and harassment of community members in Iran;
15. Deplores the fact that atheists are still persecuted in almost all of the region and that apostasy carries the death sentence in several countries; expresses its regret that freedom of worship is severely limited in some of the countries in the Middle East, with the notable example of Saudi Arabia, where public practice of any religion other than Islam is strictly prohibited;

Asia

16. Notes that persecution of religious minorities in Asia is commonplace in many countries, especially in those with communist regimes, and that blasphemy laws are of particular concern, particularly in Pakistan;

17. Deplores the crimes against Muslim communities in Asia, including the past and current human rights abuses against the Muslim Rohingya population;
18. Is concerned about the situation of Buddhists; takes special note of the difficult situation faced by Buddhists in Vietnam;
19. Underlines that Hindus continued to be harassed in 19 countries in 2018, most notably in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka;
20. Strongly condemns terror attacks on places of worship, including the Easter attacks in Sri Lanka in 2019, when nine suicide bombers carried out a series of attacks, including on three churches;

Sub-Saharan Africa

21. Notes with particular concern the rise of terrorist groups and militias in several parts of Africa, including in the Sahel, Nigeria and Mozambique, and of terrorist violence against religious minorities;
22. Strongly condemns, in this regard, the violence, including murder, kidnapping and burning of places of worship, committed by terrorist and militant groups against Christian and Muslim communities in Nigeria, Mozambique and the Central African Republic;

Tackling key challenges posed by the persecution against religious minorities

23. Stresses the paramount importance of holding accountable perpetrators of human rights abuses against persons belonging to religious minorities; calls on the EU and Member States to urgently work towards the establishment of UN mechanisms and committees to investigate current human rights violations against religious minorities around the world;
24. Calls on the Council and EU Member States to apply sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for or involved in systematic violations of the rights of persons belonging to religious minorities, as provided for by the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime;
25. Is appalled by the exacerbation of persecution against religious minority groups during the COVID-19 pandemic; denounces the fact that persons belonging to religious minorities have been scapegoated, blamed for spreading the COVID-19 virus, and have been denied or faced discrimination in access to public healthcare, food or humanitarian aid, on the basis of religious or belief criteria;
26. Underlines that women belonging to religious minorities have been specifically and increasingly targeted with the purpose of inflicting harm on their community as a whole; stresses that they are particularly exposed to violent attacks, kidnapping, sexual violence, forced conversion, forced and early marriage and domestic incarceration, and that lockdown measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic have made their human rights situation even more precarious;

27. Condemns the use by authoritarian regimes of legislation on security, sedition and the fight against terrorism and extremism as an instrument to persecute persons belonging to religious minorities, to outlaw the practise or expression of their religion and gatherings of believers, and to deter the registration of religious associations; calls on the Commission and European External Action Service (EEAS) to monitor carefully the implementation of such legislation, and to consistently raise this issue in bilateral dialogues with the governments concerned; urges EU Member States to reject any request by foreign authorities for judicial and police cooperation in individual judicial cases if they are based on such legislation;
28. Deplores the fact that more than 70 countries in the world enforce criminal laws or seek to introduce new legislation which provide for punishments for blasphemy, apostasy and conversion, including the death sentence; notes that laws already in place are used disproportionately against people belonging to religious minorities, and are thus seen, with good reason, as an instrument of oppression; calls for the EU to intensify its political dialogue with all countries concerned with a view to repeal those laws;

Strengthening EU human rights foreign policy and external actions to address the persecution of religious minorities

29. Welcomes the recent appointment of Mr Christos Stylianides as the EU Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief; calls on the Commission to include objectives for the fight against persecution of minorities on the grounds of belief or religion as important part of his mandate; recommends that the Special Envoy works closely with the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and the Council Working Group on Human Rights (COHOM), and reiterates its calls on the Council and the Commission to adequately support the Special Envoy's institutional mandate, capacity and duties;
30. Calls on the Council, the Commission, EEAS and EU Member States to address persecutions based on belief or religion as a priority of EU human rights foreign policy, in line with the EU action plan for human rights and democracy for 2020-2024; stresses that a multi-layered and multi-actor approach is needed to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief, encompassing human rights, conflict resolution and interfaith initiatives that involve multiple state and non-state actors; reiterates its call for a public review of the EU Guidelines on freedom of religion or belief, allowing for the assessment of their implementation and of proposals for their update; also calls for progress reports on the implementation of the Guidelines to be communicated regularly to Parliament;
31. Urges the EEAS and EU Delegations to include objectives specifically related to the protection of religious minorities for all relevant situations, as part of the human rights and democracy country strategies (HRDCSs) for 2021-2024. and to consistently raise general issues and specific cases relating to the persecution of religious minorities during human rights dialogues with partner countries; reiterates its call for Members of the European Parliament to be given access to the content of HRDCSs;
32. Calls on the Commission and EEAS to scrutinise the human rights situations of religious minorities in third countries and the implementation of related commitments

under bilateral agreements of those countries with the EU;

33. Recommends strengthening EU multilateral engagement with like-minded states and other actors with a view to promoting and mainstreaming the respect for religious minorities in human rights policies everywhere in the world; calls for the EU and EU Member States to enhance cooperation with the UN, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), to intensify its dialogues with the African Union and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and to forge alliances with third countries in order to provide international responses to human rights issues faced by religious minorities, in particular those who are most vulnerable or targeted in conflict areas; also recommends that the EU continue to be the lead sponsor of resolutions on freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief in the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council;

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34. 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 EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the United Nations.