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United in diversity

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Recent attacks on Christian communities

European Parliament resolution of 21 January 2010 on recent attacks on Christian communities

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,
 - having regard to Article 18 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
 - having regard to the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion and Belief,
 - having regard to Rule 122(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights and civil liberties are fundamental principles and aims of the European Union and constitute common ground for its relations with third countries,
- B. whereas, according to international human rights law and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in particular, everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; whereas this right includes freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching,
- C. whereas Europe, like other parts of the world, is not exempt from cases of violation of that freedom, and experiences individual crimes committed against members of minorities on the basis of their beliefs,
- D. whereas the European Union has repeatedly expressed its commitment to freedom of thought, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion and has stressed that government has a duty to guarantee these freedoms all over the world,
- E. whereas on 6 January 2010 a drive-by shooting killed seven individuals – six Coptic Christians and a policeman – and injured others when worshipers were leaving a church after midnight mass on Coptic Christmas Eve in the city of Nagaa Hammadi in Upper Egypt; whereas, in recent weeks, further clashes involving Coptic Christians and Muslims have broken out and have been qualified by the Egyptian Government as individual incidents,
- F. whereas on 8 January 2010 the Egyptian authorities announced that they had arrested and were holding three people in connection with the attack in Nagaa Hammadi on 6 January; whereas the Egyptian Public Prosecutor decided that the three accused should be tried before the Emergency State Security Court for premeditated murder,

- G. whereas Coptic Christians represent around 10% of the Egyptian population; whereas there have been recurrent acts of violence against Coptic Christians in Egypt over recent years,
- H. whereas the Egyptian Constitution guarantees freedom of belief and freedom to practise religious rites,
- I. whereas it attaches great importance to relations with Egypt and underlines the importance of Egypt and EU-Egypt relations for the stability and development of the EU-Mediterranean area,
- J. whereas the Malaysian Catholic Church had filed a lawsuit against the Malaysian Government in 2007 after the Government threatened to prohibit publication of the *Herald* newspaper on grounds of national security if it did not stop using the word ‘Allah’, commonly used by the Bahasa-Malaysia-speaking community, of Christian faith, as a translation of ‘God’,
- K. whereas, on 31 December 2009, the Malaysian High Court ruled that Christians in Malaysia have the constitutional right to use the word ‘Allah’ to refer to God and that the word is not exclusive to Islam,
- L. whereas, following the ruling, there were at least nine attacks on Christian churches in Malaysia,
- M. whereas in 2009 the Government had confiscated more than 15 000 copies of the Bible in the Malay language, in which the word ‘Allah’ was used to refer to God, and it has not, to date, returned them,
- N. whereas the Malaysian Government accepts the use of the word ‘Allah’ by the Christian communities in Sahah and Sarawak states, while questioning it in other regions of the country, thus generating additional discrimination among the whole Christian community in Malaysia,
- O. whereas inter-community dialogue is crucial to promoting peace and mutual understanding between peoples,
1. Stresses that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right guaranteed by international legal instruments, and strongly condemns all kinds of violence, discrimination and intolerance, based on religion and belief, against religious people, apostates and non-believers;
 2. Expresses its concern about the recent attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt and its solidarity with the families of the victims; calls on the Egyptian Government to ensure the personal safety and physical integrity of Coptic Christians and of members of other religious minorities in the country;
 3. Welcomes the efforts made by the Egyptian authorities to identify the authors and perpetrators of the 6 January 2010 attack; calls on the Egyptian Government to ensure that all persons responsible for that attack, as well as for other violent acts against Coptic Christians or other religious or other minorities, are brought to justice and tried by due process;

4. Calls on the Egyptian Government to guarantee that Coptic Christians and members of other religious communities and of minorities enjoy the full range of human rights and fundamental freedoms – including the right to choose and change their religion freely – and to prevent any discrimination against them;
5. Deplores incidents of religiously motivated violence on European soil, including the murder of Marwa al-Sherbini, and expresses its solidarity with the families of the victims;
6. Expresses its concern about the recent attacks against churches and places of worship in Malaysia and its solidarity with the victims; calls on the Malaysian authorities to ensure the personal safety and physical integrity of people practising their religion and to take appropriate steps to protect churches and other houses of worship;
7. Calls on the Malaysian authorities to carry out thorough and rapid investigations into reported attacks against places of worship and to bring those responsible to justice;
8. Considers that the action of the Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs constitutes violation of the freedom of religion; is especially worried that the Malaysian Government has acted outside the law and that its interference has contributed to mounting tensions among religious groups in the country;
9. Welcomes the ruling by Malaysia's High Court and calls on the Malaysian authorities to respect its decision; calls on the Malaysian Government not to seek to reinstate the ban on use of the word 'Allah' but to try to defuse the resulting tensions and to refrain from further actions that might upset the peaceful coexistence between the dominant and minority religions, as stipulated in the Constitution of Malaysia;
10. Calls on the Council, the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in the framework of EU relations and cooperation with the countries concerned, to pay particular attention to the situation of religious minorities, including Christian communities;
11. Supports all initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue and mutual respect between communities; calls on all religious authorities to promote tolerance and to take initiatives against hatred and violent and extremist radicalisation;
12. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Government and Parliament of Egypt and the Government and Parliament of Malaysia.