



11.02.2015

JOINT MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for the debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 135 of the Rules of Procedure

on Saudi Arabia, the case of Mr Raif Badawi

...on behalf of the EPP Group

...on behalf of the S&D Group

...on behalf of the ECR Group

tabled by Guy Verhofstadt, Marietje Schaake, Robert Rochefort, Fernando Maura Barandiarán, Ramon Tremosa i Balcells, Ilhan Kyuchyuk, Ivo Vajgl, Maite Pagazaurtundúa, Marielle De Sarnez, Beatriz Becerra, Pavel Telička, Juan Carlos Girauta Vidal, Fredrick Federley, Kaja Kallas, Petras Auštrevičius, Hilde Vautmans, Ivan Jakovčić, Jozo Radoš, Hans Van Baalen, Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Filiz Hyusmenova, Gérard Deprez, Louis Michel, Martina Dlabajová, Urmas Paet and Dita Charanzová

on behalf of the ALDE Group

...on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group

...on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

... on behalf of the EFDD Group

European Parliament resolution on the case of Mr Raif Badawi, Saudi Arabia

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Saudi Arabia, notably those concerning human rights and, in particular, the report on Saudi Arabia, its relations with the EU and its role in the Middle East and North Africa of 11 March 2014,
- having regard to the statement by the Spokesperson of the High Representative/Vice President for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, on 9 January 2015,
- having regard to the statement by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, appealing to the Saudi authorities to halt the punishment of Raif Badawi,
- having regard to Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 19 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, (EPP)
- having regard to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,
- having regard to the Arab Charter on Human Rights, which Saudi Arabia ratified in 2009, whose article 32 paragraph 1 guarantees the right to information and freedom of opinion and expression, and article 8 prohibits physical or psychological torture or cruel, degrading, humiliating or inhuman treatment (GUE),
- having regard to the European Union Guidelines on Torture and Ill-Treatment, and on Human Rights Defenders
- having regard to Rule 135 of its Rules of Procedure,

A. Whereas Raif Badawi, a blogger and human rights activist, was charged with apostasy and sentenced by the Criminal Court of Jeddah in May 2014 to 10 years in prison, 1 000 lashes and a fine of 1 million riyals (228.000 EUR) after creating the website “Free Saudi Liberals Network” for social, political and religious debate which was deemed as insulting Islam; whereas the sentence also bans Mr Badawi from using any media outlets, as well as from travelling abroad for 10 years after his release from prison;

B. Whereas on 9 January 2015 Mr Badawi received his first set of 50 lashes in front of the Al-Jafali mosque in Jeddah, resulting in wounds so profound that when Mr Badawi was taken to a prison clinic for a medical check-up, it was found by the doctors that he would not be able to withstand another round of lashes;

C. Whereas judicial verdicts imposing corporal punishment, including flogging(Greens N), are strictly prohibited under international human rights law, including the UN Convention against torture, which Saudi Arabia has ratified;

D. Whereas on 6 July 2014, Raif Badawi's lawyer, prominent human rights defender Waleed Abu al-Khair, was sentenced by the Specialized Criminal Court to 15 years in prison, to be followed by a 15-year travel ban after setting up the human rights organization "Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia";

E. Whereas the case of Mr Badawi is one of many cases in which harsh sentences and harassment were used against Saudi human rights activists other reform advocates persecuted for expressing their views, several of whom have been convicted, under procedures which fall short of international fair trial standards, as has been confirmed by the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in July 2014,

F. Whereas Saudi Arabia has a lively community of online activists and the highest number of Twitter users in the Middle East (EPP D, ECR 1); whereas, however, the Internet is heavily censored, with thousands of websites being blocked and new blogs and websites needing a license of the Ministry of Information; whereas Saudi Arabia is on the Reporters Without Borders list of "Enemies of the Internet" due to the censorship of the Saudi media and the Internet and punishment of those who criticise the government or religion;

G. Whereas freedom of expression and freedom of the press and media, both online and offline, are crucial preconditions and catalysts for democratisation and reform and are essential checks on power;

H. Whereas in spite of the introduction of some cautious reforms during the rule of late King Abdullah, the Saudi political and social system remains profoundly undemocratic, makes women and Shia Muslims second-class citizens, seriously discriminates against the country's large foreign workforce and severely represses all voices of dissent;

I. Whereas the number and pace of executions are a matter of serious concern; whereas over 87 persons were executed in 2014, mostly by public beheading; whereas at least 21 persons have been executed since the beginning of the year; were 423 executions are reported between 2007 and 2012; whereas the death penalty can be imposed for a wide range of offenses;

J. Whereas the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is an influential political, economic, cultural and religious actor in the Middle East and the Islamic world, and a founder and leading member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and of the G-20 group;

K. Whereas Saudi Arabia was elected as a 3-year member of the UN Human Rights Council in November 2013;

L. Whereas the so-called Islamic State and Saudi Arabia prescribe near-identical punishments for a host of crimes, as death penalty for blasphemy, murder, acts of homosexuality, theft or treason; death by stoning for adultery or amputation of hand and foot for banditry;

M. Whereas Saudi Arabia plays a leading role in financing, disseminating and promoting worldwide a particularly extremist interpretation of Islam; whereas the most sectarian vision of Islam has inspired terrorist organisations such as the so-called Islamic State and Al-Qaeda;

N. Whereas Saudi Arabian authorities claim to be a partner to EU Members States, notably in the global fight against terror; whereas a new counter-terrorism law adopted in January 2014 includes provisions which allow turning any dissenting expression or independent association into a crime of terrorism;

1. Strongly condemns the flogging Raif Badawi as a cruel and shocking act by the Saudi Arabian authorities; calls on the Saudi authorities to put a stop to any further flogging of Raif Badawi, release him immediately and unconditionally as he is considered a prisoner of conscience, detained and sentenced solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression; calls on the Saudi authorities to ensure that his conviction and sentence are quashed, including his travel ban;

2. Calls on the Saudi authorities to ensure that Raif Badawi is protected from torture and other ill-treatment; is given any medical attention he may require, as well as immediate and regular access to his family and lawyers of his choice;

3. Calls on the Saudi authorities to unconditionally release Raif Badawi's lawyer, as well as all human rights defenders and other prisoners of conscience detained and sentenced for merely expressing their right to freedom of expression;

4. Condemns firmly any form of corporal punishment as an unacceptable and degrading treatment contrary to human dignity and voices concern about States' use of flogging and strongly calls for its strict abolition; calls on the Saudi authorities to respect the prohibition of torture as it is most notably enshrined in the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which Saudi Arabia has signed and ratified; calls on Saudi Arabia to sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

5. Stresses the process of judicial reform undertaken by Saudi Arabia with a view to strengthen the possibility for improved protection of individual rights, but remains gravely concerned by the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia, which continues to rank among the most repressive countries worldwide; considers the case of Raif Badawi as a symbol of the assault on freedom of expression and peaceful dissent in the country, and more broadly of the Kingdom's characteristic policies of intolerance and extremist interpretation of Islamic law;

6. Urges the Saudi authorities to abolish the Specialized Criminal Court, set up in 2008 to try terrorism cases but increasingly used to prosecute peaceful dissidents on apparently politically motivated charges and in proceedings that violate the fundamental right to a fair trial;

7. calls on the Saudi authorities to allow independent press and media and ensure freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly for all inhabitants of Saudi Arabia; condemns the repression of activists and protesters when they demonstrate peacefully; stresses that the peaceful advocacy of basic legal rights or making critical remarks using social media are expressions of an indispensable right;

8. Reminds the Saudi Arabia leadership of its pledge to "uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights" when it applied successfully for membership to the UN Human Rights Council in 2013;
9. Believes that Saudi Arabia would be a more credible and effective partner in fighting terrorist organizations such as the so-called Islamic State and Al Qaeda if it will not engage in anachronistic and extremist practices, such as public beheadings, stoning and other forms of torture, similar to those committed by IS;
10. Calls on the EEAS and the Commission to support, in an active and creative manner, civil society groups and individuals defending human rights in Saudi Arabia, including through arranging prison visits, trial monitoring and public statements;
11. Instructs its Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula to raise the issue of Raif Badawi and the other prisoners of conscience during the course of its forthcoming visit to Saudi Arabia and to report back to its Subcommittee on Human Rights;
12. Calls on the EU and its Member States to reconsider their relationship with Saudi Arabia, in a way that allows it to pursue its economic, energy and security interests, whilst not undermining the credibility of its core human rights commitments;
13. 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 European External Action Service, the UN Secretary General, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, H.M. King Salman Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Secretary-General of the Centre for National Dialogue of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.