What scope is there under Community policy for making improvements to the difficult living conditions of the women in question, who, by comparison with working women in other rural areas who enjoy more comfortable living conditions, are the victims of isolation?

Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(21 September 2000)

The Commission has already received information on this region in the documents submitted in the context of the rural development programmes and Community Support Framework, which stress the isolation of women, the problems arising from rural unemployment and the need for training and better living conditions.

The rural development programmes make it possible to help women working in agriculture, particularly by aiding investment and the installation of women farmers, by diversifying rural activities towards tourism and crafts in particular, by developing services, including childcare, transport and infrastructure, and by improving living conditions, including the cultural aspects that contribute thereto.

In addition to the rural development programmes, which have to take account of equal opportunities as laid down in Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 of 17 May 1999 on support for rural from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) and amending and repealing certain Regulations (1), the Leader+ Community initiative must include specific measures for rural women. In addition, the European Social Fund offers measures relating more specifically to training and employment, as does the Employment initiative.

While the Commission encourages measures in this field, it is for the national and regional authorities to include them in their programmes and to carry them out with due regard to the principle of equal opportunities.

Moreover, the Spanish Women’s Institute, which has branches in every region, has taken many initiatives on training and employment for women. Some of the measures put forward for structural funding will make it possible to part-finance these activities.


WRITTEN QUESTION E-2187/00
by Richard Howitt (PSE) to the Commission

(3 July 2000)

Subject: Attack on bonded labourers and human rights workers in India

Can the Commission seek information as to whether the 11 bonded labourers from the villages of Kili-Nahal-Singh-Wala and Buraj Mehma in Punjab State, India, who filed cases for their release with the District Magistrate on 13 November 1999, have now been freed and whether any prosecutions were initiated against landlords for illegally employing bonded labourers or for using threats and intimidation in order to persuade individuals to abandon their cases?

Can it seek information as to what action has been taken by the Indian authorities to bring to justice the instigators of the attempted abduction of bonded labourers from the human rights organisation, Volunteers for Social Justice on 7 February 2000 and to ensure the safety of human rights workers at Volunteers for Social Justice.
Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(28 July 2000)

In response to the questions raised by the Honourable Member on the above issues, the Commission has undertaken thorough research through its delegation in New Delhi.

According to the accessible information, 11 bonded labourers were freed from a stone quarry from Charki Dadri, near Bhiwani, in Haryana on 11 February 2000, through the efforts made by the National Human Rights Commission acting on a petition filed by the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude.

Regarding prosecution of landlords for illegally employing bonded labourers, unfortunately, no information is available and relevant details on the human rights organisation Volunteers for Social Justice could not be retraced.

If the Honourable Member could provide additional information, the Commission will be happy to pursue its enquires.

(2001/C 103 E/088)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2188/00
by Avril Doyle (PPE-DE) to the Council

(11 July 2000)

Subject: Diamonds and African conflicts

Given that the sale of diamonds fuels many African conflicts, particularly the conflicts in Sierra Leone and in Angola, that the planned embargo on diamonds from rebel-held areas in Sierra Leone, instigated by the UK government within the UN; would be almost impossible to enforce (1) that London jewellers are eager to buy Sierra Leone diamonds (2) and that most smuggled diamonds have ended up in Antwerp (3), would the Council outline what the EU is doing to help resolve the situation in general, what it is doing specifically to prevent the trade in diamonds mined inside rebel-held territories and what the EU's overall strategy is with a view to preventing the illegal funding of conflicts in Africa?

(1) The Financial Times, 8 June 2000.
(2) The Observer, 4 June 2000.
(3) The Economist, 3 June and 9 June 2000.

Reply

(9 November 2000)

The European Union has always supported unreservedly all endeavours at international level to put an end to the illegal exploitation of diamonds and other assets of the African countries ravaged by armed conflicts.

The Council of 22 May 2000 also expressed the deep concern with which it views the illegal exploitation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's natural resources — minerals in particular — and other assets, which violates inter alia the sovereignty of that country; the Council welcomed the proposal of the Secretary-General of the United Nations regarding the setting up of a group of experts in accordance with Resolution 1291 of the Security Council.

At that meeting the Council also referred to the case of Angola and stressed the importance of observing the United Nations Security Council Resolutions banning imports of diamonds which are not duly certified by the Angolan Government. At stake was a valuable political tool intended to force UNITA to observe the