Subject: Slavery

In late May, the US-led Eminent Persons Group on Slavery, which was set up by President Bush and includes members from a number of European countries, published a damning report on the situation in Sudan. The Group accused the Sudanese Government of turning a blind eye to slavery. Slavery is a phenomenon which occurs not only in a large number of African countries but also, for example, in the Islamic Gulf States, in the Caucasus and in south-east Asia.

1. Is the Council aware of the existence of that report? What political conclusions does it draw therefrom?

2. Is the Council aware of slavery occurring in ACP States? If so, what policy is it pursuing with a view to this practice being abolished in those countries?

3. Was this subject addressed in the political dialogue? If so, what was the outcome? If not, why not?

4. What sanctions does the Council have at its disposal if no progress is made towards the abolition of slavery in those countries where its existence is proven?

Reply

(19 December 2002)

The Council has taken note of the international Eminent Persons Group report on Slavery, Abduction and Forced Servitude in Sudan, presented by US Senator Danforth and released by the US Bureau of African Affairs on 22 May 2002. The Council will discuss the different elements of the report at a later stage, possibly in the context of the assessment of the political dialogue.

The Council adopted conclusions on Sudan on 17 June 2002. In those conclusions the Council underlines that the EU's main interest in its relations with Sudan is the promotion of a peace settlement, and respect for human rights and humanitarian law, as a pre-condition for internal and regional stability. The EU also aims to pursue the linked issues of democracy, rule of law and the alleviation of poverty.

The Council welcomed the EU-Sudan political dialogue since the last Troika visit to Khartoum in December 2001 and noted the developments registered so far. The EU has discussed the human rights situation with the Sudanese government and expressed its concern. The Council endorsed the EU approach to the peace process in Sudan, stressing its appeal for a comprehensive ceasefire as part of a comprehensive and just peace negotiation process. A fresh assessment of the dialogue between the EU and Sudan since November 1999 is scheduled to take place in December 2002. The resumption of EU development cooperation with Sudan is subject to progress towards a peace settlement.

At an international level, the EU has once again initiated resolutions on the human rights situation in Sudan, in close consultation with the relevant Special Rapporteurs, at the Third Committee of the 56th session of the UN General Assembly in 2001 and at the 58th session of the Commission on Human Rights in 2002. Amongst other things, the Government of Sudan was urged to prevent and stop abduction of women and children and their subjection to forced labour or similar conditions, and to prevent all acts of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

Human rights are regularly taken up in the EU political dialogue with third countries. Whenever the Council disposes of specific and substantiated allegations, concrete cases are addressed and the EU will consequently emphasise that slavery and abduction of civilians are forbidden under international law.
Signatories to the ACP-EC Partnership Agreement, which includes Sudan, have agreed that respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law should underpin the domestic and international policies of the Parties and constitute the essential elements of the Agreement. If, despite a political dialogue conducted regularly between the Parties, a Party considers that the other Party has failed to fulfil an obligation stemming from the Agreement, it can invite the other Party to hold consultations that focus on the measures taken or to be taken to remedy the situation. If consultations do not lead to an acceptable solution, appropriate measures may be taken.

(2003/C92E/186)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2093/02
by Alexandros Alavanos (GUE/NGL) to the Council
(16 July 2002)

Subject: Human rights in Algeria

On the eve of the European troika’s visit to Algeria, the Director of Amnesty International’s Brussels office, Dick Oosting, addressed an open letter to EU representatives Javier Solana, Josep Piqué and Chris Patten, calling for greater transparency in talks held with countries such as Algeria ‘where serious violations of human rights, including killings, torture and secret detentions, continue’. The letter addresses specific questions concerning human rights in Algeria to the EU’s representatives for them to put to their Algerian interlocutors. Having discussed the human rights issues, does the Council consider the answers which it received from the Algerian authorities to be satisfactory?

Reply
(16-19 December 2002)

The Council is keeping a close watch on matters concerning respect for human rights in Algeria. In this context and in the framework of the meetings for regular political dialogue which have been held with Algeria since 1997, the Council has pointed out repeatedly that it is concerned by the reports on arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial arrests, the use of torture and the fate of missing persons. It invites Algeria, as it did in the letter to which the Honourable Member refers, to cooperate with relevant UN and NGO mechanisms and to provide information on the fate of several missing persons. A list of certain missing persons has been sent to the Algerian authorities for the purpose.

The Algerian authorities replied concerning certain specific cases in a note verbale dated March 2000. Since the response was not considered satisfactory, the Council has brought up these cases again (along with some other cases) at the political dialogue meetings. Algeria does not deny the possibility of slippage on the part of certain elements in the security forces, but states that it is conducting investigations into the matter and that it has already processed more than 4,000 missing persons cases, a majority of which have been closed. It states that it opens a preliminary inquiry for each case. At a meeting in December 2001, Mr Belkhadem, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, noted that the inquiries had shown that the persons concerned were dead or had emigrated or had perhaps joined the terrorists, their whereabouts remaining unknown. The EU does not consider this response to be satisfactory and will continue to raise the cases of missing persons and to emphasise strongly that any slippage and abuses must in all cases be avoided and that combating terrorism does not justify human rights violations.

As long as respect for human rights continues to pose a problem in Algeria, questions on respect for human rights will remain on the agenda for political dialogue.