In view of the foregoing:

- Is the Commission aware of the serious and persistent violations of freedom of religion in Turkmenistan and of the incidents reported?

- What initiatives does the Commission intend to take, or to call for, with a view to bringing pressure to bear on the Turkmen authorities to ensure religious freedom is upheld in Turkmenistan?

**Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission**

(29 July 2003)

The Commission is fully aware of the very difficult conditions facing religious minorities in Turkmenistan.

The Commission is very concerned about the lack of commitment of the Turkmen Authorities to improve the situation of minority religious groups. Turkmenistan does not respect its commitments on religious freedom that are enshrined in the Turkmen Constitution and accepted by the government in its international agreements in the Organisation on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The Commission will continue to raise this question with the Turkmen Authorities at each bilateral meeting.

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(2004/C 88 E/0079)  

**WRITTEN QUESTION P.2198/03**  

by Niall Andrews (UEN) to the Commission  

(26 June 2003)

Subject: Safeguarding human rights in Mexico

Is the Commission aware of the ongoing human rights abuses in Mexico highlighted by Amnesty International?

These include:

- the harassment, intimidation and murder of human rights defenders;

- the arrest and ‘disappearance’ of political opponents, campaigners for indigenous rights and members of indigenous communities;

- the murder of more than 200 women in Ciudad Juárez since 1993 and the failure of the Mexican authorities to conduct effective and appropriate investigations.

Is the Commission aware that, while Mexico has repeatedly committed itself to respecting human rights and to improving its human rights record, and having ratified the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearances of Persons, it refuses, nonetheless, to investigate cases of ‘disappearances’ which occurred before ratification of the Treaty?

Is the Commission also aware that cases involving the military continue to be heard by secret military tribunals only, thus undermining the credibility of the investigations?

Since the EU defines human rights and democracy as ‘essential elements’ in its relationship with countries outside the EU and for the strengthening of trade links between the EU and Mexico, will the Commission indicate what measures it intends to take to ensure that the Mexican Government fulfils its human rights commitments and obligations?
Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(10 July 2003)

The commitment of the Commission to the promotion of human rights forms a central part to all bi-lateral agreements. The process of safeguarding and ensuring human rights is institutionalised under the 'democratic clause' which forms a central part of the Union-Mexico relations governed by the Agreement on Economic Partnership, Political Co-ordination and Co-operation (Global Agreement), which came into force on 1 October 2000 and which is founded on three pillars: political, cooperation and trade.

The institutional framework established in the Agreement is, at present, the forum where an open and productive political dialogue takes place at all levels: presidential, ministerial and high ranking civil servants. This allows the Union to exchange points of view concerning, among other bilateral and multilateral issues and the evolution of human rights in both parties. The Commission considers that this arrangement is satisfactory and is not pursuing, at this stage, the adoption of additional measures in this area.

In September 2002 Mexico ratified the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons. While the Commission commends Mexico’s ratification of this Convention, as it was drawn up by the Organisation of American States, the Commission has no direct power of enforcement. However, it uses the existing mechanisms to exchange views, and when necessary, to encourage its partners to respect and implement at all levels the different human rights related agreements and conventions. In this context, the Commission has been encouraged by the attempts of President Fox to bring issues of human rights to the forefront of his political agenda and to bring those accountable for past crimes to justice. Whereas the Commission recognises certain shortcomings in the judicial system, the Commission will endeavour to support, where possible, any reform that establishes a more credible, transparent and functioning judicial system. In this area, a Union co-operation project of the reform of the judicial system in Mexico will start in the second half of 2003.

While the Commission is aware of certain levels of impunity and the continuation of human rights violations, it is hoped that greater political dialogue and focussed co-operation in this area will ensure that Mexico’s ongoing struggle to reform is successful.

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(2004/C 88 E/0080) WRITTEN QUESTION E-2223/03

by Paulo Casaca (PSE) to the Commission

(2 July 2003)

Subject: Secret European Union agreements with third parties on nuclear power

According to the ‘European Voice’ of 12 June 2003, last week the Council approved a secret agreement with China on nuclear power. The same newspaper also reports that the agreement will rule out the use of nuclear installations to construct weapons of mass destruction.

Can the Commission confirm whether it is aware of the existence of this agreement?

Can it make this agreement public or explain why it will not do so?

Can it explain how it is possible to ensure that an agreement of this kind will not have implications as regards the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction?

Can it establish that no similar agreement has been concluded with Iran?

Can it supply the minutes of the meetings which it held with leading figures from the Iranian regime as part of the ‘constructive dialogue’ on energy?