According to ‘A Community of fifteen: key figures’, 2000 edition, in 1998 less than 20% of the population of the EU consisted of children aged from 0 to 14. Assuming the population of the EU to be around 370 million, the population would include 74 million children under 15 at the absolute maximum. Even if one allows for the increase in the EU’s population due to enlargement, it would hardly be possible to arrive at a figure of 157 million children in Europe.

The Commission:
1. What criteria did it use to arrive at the figure of 157 million children in Europe?
2. Could the figure quoted by the Commission be due to a misprint?
3. If so, how many children are really suffering from environment-related problems in Europe?

Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission
(30 April 2004)

1. The Commission has quoted the figure of 157 million children in Europe based on the United Nations (UN) Population Data Base as no data was available from Directorate-General Eurostat at this stage. The figure refers to the population of children aged 0-15 in Europe in 2000. The figure, however, refers to the total number of children inhabiting Europe and not to the number of children suffering from environmentally-related diseases.

2. The figure quoted by the Commission is not due to a misprint. The relevant reference website is: www.un.org/popin/data.html.

3. At this stage, the Commission does not have reliable figures on how many children are suffering from diseases related to the environment across Europe. It has been estimated that up to one fifth of the total burden of disease in industrialised countries can be attributed to environmental factors. In this respect, children are an important target group as they are particularly vulnerable to environmental hazards. One important development in this context is the significant increase in childhood asthma observed in developed western societies to levels where around 10% of children are suffering from asthmatic symptoms. The environment and health monitoring work to be developed as a key priority of the EU Environment and health strategy will make it possible to develop specific estimates on the numbers of children affected by diseases related to the environment.


WRITTEN QUESTION E-0938/04
by Margrietus van den Berg (PSE) to the Commission
(26 March 2004)

Subject: Religious minorities in Gujarat

Following the Commission’s answer of 15 May 2003 to question E-1417/03 (1) tabled by myself and other MEPs on 9 April 2003, there has been scarcely any improvement in the situation in Gujarat with regard to bringing to justice the perpetrators of the February 2002 massacre and rehabilitation of the victims and/or their relatives. In November 2003 Amnesty International again reported the illegal detention of Moslems in Gujarat. Before this there was a Human Rights Watch report on threats to human rights activists in Gujarat. AWAAT South Asia Watch recently concluded in its report ‘In Bad Faith? British Charity and Hindu Extremism’ that umbrella organisations of the Hindu extremist RSS had raised millions of pounds from the British public under false pretences and was channelling it to organisations involved in large-scale violence and incitement to hatred against minorities. Finally, there have been various reports of discrimination against Muslims in employment.
1. Is the Commission aware of these reports by Amnesty International, Human Right Watch and AWAAZ?

2. Has the Commission taken any action in response to the reports?

3. If so, what was the outcome? If not, why not?

4. Does the current situation in Gujarat have implications for the ability of European firms effectively to apply the principle of non-discrimination in their personnel policy?

(1) See page 30.

Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(30 April 2004)

The Commission is aware of the reports mentioned by the Honourable Member and continues to follow closely the developments in Gujarat. The Commission fully agrees that the perpetrators of the crimes should be brought to justice, the victims rehabilitated, and the rights of religious minorities protected.

The Commission has responded to the Gujarat violence by providing a relief package for the victims through its Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO).

Furthermore, the EU has agreed to deal with all matters concerning democracy and human rights in India through its regular, on-going constructive dialogue with the Indian Government.

India and the EU have recently engaged in the ‘Athens process’ — regular human rights consultations with the Indian authorities — to exchange views on issues of concern. EU Heads of Mission in New Delhi (including the Commission’s Head of Delegation) are closely monitoring human rights issues, with a particular emphasis on Gujarat and questions of religious freedom.

It is not within the purview of the Commission to give explicit recommendations to private companies on how they should operate in third countries. However, the Commission is committed to encouraging companies to act according to United Nations (UN) and EU guidelines on Corporate Social Responsibility. These guidelines notably make clear reference to the need to protect and promote the human rights of employees, and to avoid discrimination against minority groups.

(2004/C 88 E/0257)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0940/04

by Robert Evans (PSE) to the Commission

(26 March 2004)

Subject: Churches in Indonesia

I have received several letters from constituents regarding Reverend Rinaldy Damanik, a leader of the Protestant Christian Community in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. Has the Commission any further information on his situation to add to the response that it gave to Written Question E-2815/03 (1) in October 2003?

Is the Commission also aware of the recent closure of several churches in Indonesia and the lack of resolution of the enforced conversion of thousands of Christians to Islam during the sectarian conflict in the Molucca Islands? Is the Commission making representations to encourage the Indonesian Government to put an end to these and other examples of the persecution of Christians in Indonesia?

(1) See page 117.