WRITTEN QUESTION E-1182/03

by Marco Pannella (NI), Emma Bonino (NI), Marco Cappato (NI), Gianfranco Dell’Alba (NI) and Benedetto Della Vedova (NI) to the Commission

(1 April 2003)

Subject: Individual cases of arbitrary arrest and torture of Montagnards (Degar) by the Vietnamese authorities

On 15 March 2003, the Montagnard Foundation and ABC Radio Australia reported that, at around 7 a.m. on 24 February 2003, security officials arrested the following Montagnards (Degar) from the village of Buon Cuor Knia (Buon Don district, in the province of Dak Lac) who were members of the Transnational Radical Party: Y-Phan Buon Krong, born in 1950, Y-Be Nie, born in 1945, Y-Pen Buon Ya, born in 1970, Y-Glen Buon Krong, born in 1976 and Y-Gun Hwing, born in 1974. These persons were arrested because they were suspected of supporting the Montagnard Foundation, of being Christians and of collecting the names of Montagnards wishing to join an NGO with consultative status at the UN (the Transnational Radical Party), which promotes the enforcement of human rights world-wide by non-violent means. They were handcuffed and beaten unconscious with clubs and rocks in front of their relatives; in particular, the security officials repeatedly smashed the knees of Y-Phan Buon Krong and Y-Glen Buon Krong with a large rock. The five men were then taken to the Buon Don district prison. The Vietnamese officials who tortured each of them in turn are Nguyen Truong That and Pham Huu Nhat, both of whom had been sent to the Central Highlands by the government authorities in Hanoi.

In the light of the foregoing detailed information, would the Commission state:

1. what action it intends to take to establish and ensure that those responsible for these atrocities against Montagnards are duly tried and that the victims of their violence are freed immediately?

2. its view of the fact that the Vietnamese Government regards as a criminal act the exercise of an individual’s political right to join an NGO with consultative status with Ecosoc and the UN, such as the Transnational Radical Party, which promotes the enforcement of international law on human rights by non-violent means?

3. whether it regards the behaviour of the Vietnamese authorities as compatible with the cooperation agreements signed with the Vietnamese Government, which consistently orders its own security forces to imprison, beat up and torture Montagnars who try to exercise their fundamental rights of freedom of religion, freedom of opinion, freedom of assembly and freedom of association, as enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ratified by Vietnam?

Joint answer

to Written Questions E-1180/03, E-1181/03 and E-1182/03

given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(13 May 2003)

The Commission, together with the Member States represented in Vietnam, monitors closely human rights developments in Vietnam, including individual cases of concern and issues related to the rights of ethnic minorities, freedom of religion and freedom of opinion, as part of the policy of the Union to encourage and support the continued commitment of the Government of Vietnam to progress in the field of human rights. The Commission also participates with the Member States in regular dialogue with and in all démarches to the Government of Vietnam on human rights issues. It has not so far been possible to obtain independent confirmation of the alleged cases of human rights abuses that the Honourable Members refer to in their questions.

Moreover, the Member States as members and the Commission as observer fully support the work of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights and actively work with the UN Committee for
Human Rights. The Commission shares the concerns and concluding observations expressed by the UN Human Rights Committee concerning the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Vietnam is a party. This is particularly true for the Committee’s observations pertaining to the respect of the rights of members of indigenous communities, the freedom of expression in the media and the right to register and freely operate political parties.

The Commission and Member States have repeatedly urged the Government of Vietnam to strengthen its respect for political and religious freedoms, as well as further strengthen economic and social freedoms. They again expressed this request in their joint declaration at the Consultative Group meeting in Hanoi in December 2002.


The Commission, together with the Member States, will continue to follow closely the human rights situation in Vietnam, including the cases that have been mentioned by the Honourable Members, and raise specific concerns with the Government of Vietnam and take appropriate action.

(2004/C 88 E/0348) WRITTEN QUESTION E-1209/03 by Alexandros Alavanos (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(2 April 2003)

Subject: Distribution of infant milk in African countries

While the World Health Organisation (WHO) advises against the advertising of milk powder for babies in order to promote breastfeeding, companies producing milk and manufacturing infant milk powder, for example Nestlé and Danone, have infringed WHO guidelines, arguing that they are seeking to reduce child mortality and are distributing milk powder and other items to pregnant women, for example stethoscopes, free of charge. In the accompanying advertising material they maintain that their milk is comparable to breast milk.

Given that such actions infringe WHO guidelines regarding the promotion of breastfeeding and given the European interests in these companies, what action will the Commission take in response to this situation?

Answer given by Mr Nielson on behalf of the Commission

(21 May 2003)

The Commission fully supports the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk substitutes, which was adopted by the World Health Assembly in 1981. The Commission is aware and concerned that there are still baby food companies that do not adhere to the Code and governments which have not implemented its provisions. The Commission will continue to encourage the compliance of the private sector, and particularly the companies, mentioned by the Honourable Member, with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk substitutes in the context of the European Union Corporate Social Responsibility Stakeholders Forum and associated dialogues and partnerships.