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P8_TA(2015)0037

Saudi Arabia: the case of Raif Badawi**European Parliament resolution of 12 February 2015 on the case of Mr Raif Badawi, Saudi Arabia (2015/2550(RSP))**

(2016/C 310/07)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Saudi Arabia, notably those concerning human rights and, in particular, that of 11 March 2014 on Saudi Arabia, its relations with the EU and its role in the Middle East and North Africa ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to the statement of 9 January 2015 by the Spokesperson of the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini,
 - having regard to the statement by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, appealing to the Saudi authorities to halt the punishment of Raif Badawi,
 - having regard to Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 19 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
 - having regard to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,
 - having regard to the Arab Charter on Human Rights, ratified by Saudi Arabia in 2009, of which Article 32(1) guarantees the right to information and freedom of opinion and expression, and Article 8 prohibits physical or psychological torture or cruel, degrading, humiliating or inhuman treatment,
 - having regard to the European Union Guidelines on Torture and Ill-Treatment, and on Human Rights Defenders,
 - having regard to Rules 135(5) and 123(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas Raif Badawi, a blogger and human rights activist, was charged with apostasy and sentenced by the Criminal Court of Jeddah in May 2014 to 10 years in prison, 1 000 lashes and a fine of SAR 1 million (EUR 228 000) after creating the website 'Free Saudi Liberals Network' for social, political and religious debate which was deemed to be an insult to Islam; whereas the sentence also bans Mr Badawi from using any media outlets and from travelling abroad for 10 years after his release from prison;
- B. whereas on 9 January 2015, Mr Badawi received his first set of 50 lashes in front of the al-Jafari mosque in Jeddah, resulting in wounds so profound that when he was taken to a prison clinic for a medical check-up, it was found by the doctors that he would not be able to withstand another round of lashes;
- C. whereas judicial verdicts imposing corporal punishment, including flogging, are strictly prohibited under international human rights law, including the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which Saudi Arabia has ratified;
- D. whereas on 6 July 2014, Raif Badawi's lawyer, prominent human rights defender Waleed Abu al-Khair, was sentenced by the Specialised Criminal Court to 15 years in prison, to be followed by a 15-year travel ban, after setting up the human rights organisation 'Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia';

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2014)0207.

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- E. whereas the case of Mr Badawi is one of many cases in which harsh sentences and harassment have been used against Saudi human rights activists and other reform advocates persecuted for expressing their views, several of whom have been convicted, under procedures which fall short of international fair trial standards, as was confirmed by the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in July 2014;
- F. whereas Saudi Arabia has a lively community of online activists and the highest number of Twitter users in the Middle East; whereas, however, the internet is heavily censored, with thousands of websites being blocked and new blogs and websites needing a licence from the Ministry of Information; whereas Saudi Arabia is on the Reporters Without Borders list of 'Enemies of the Internet' due to the censorship of the Saudi media and the internet and the punishment of those who criticise the government or religion;
- G. whereas freedom of expression and freedom of the press and media, both online and offline, are crucial preconditions and catalysts for democratisation and reform and are essential checks on power;
- H. whereas in spite of the introduction of some cautious reforms during the rule of the late King Abdullah, the Saudi political and social system remains profoundly undemocratic, makes women and Shia Muslims second-class citizens, seriously discriminates against the country's large foreign workforce and severely represses all voices of dissent;
- I. whereas the number and pace of executions are a matter of serious concern; whereas over 87 people were executed in 2014, mostly by public beheading; whereas at least 21 people have been executed since the beginning of 2015; whereas 423 executions were reported between 2007 and 2012; whereas the death penalty can be imposed for a wide range of offenses;
- J. whereas the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an influential political, economic, cultural and religious actor in the Middle East and the Islamic world, and a founder and leading member of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the G-20;
- K. whereas in November 2013 Saudi Arabia was elected as a member of the UN Human Rights Council for a three-year period;
- L. whereas the so-called Islamic State and Saudi Arabia prescribe near-identical punishments for a host of crimes, including the death penalty for blasphemy, murder, acts of homosexuality, theft or treason, death by stoning for adultery and the amputation of hands and feet for banditry;
- M. whereas Saudi Arabia plays a leading role in financing, disseminating and promoting worldwide a particularly extremist interpretation of Islam; whereas the most sectarian vision of Islam has inspired terrorist organisations such as the so-called Islamic State and al-Qaeda;
- N. whereas Saudi Arabian authorities claim to be a partner to Member States, notably in the global fight against terror; whereas a new counter-terrorism law adopted in January 2014 includes provisions which allow for all dissenting expressions or independent associations to be interpreted as terrorist crimes;
1. Strongly condemns the flogging of Raif Badawi as a cruel and shocking act by the Saudi Arabian authorities; calls on the Saudi authorities to put a stop to any further flogging of Raif Badawi and to release him immediately and unconditionally, as he is considered a prisoner of conscience, detained and sentenced solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression; calls on the Saudi authorities to ensure that his conviction and sentence, including his travel ban, are quashed;

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2. Calls on the Saudi authorities to ensure that Raif Badawi be protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and be given any medical attention he may require, as well as immediate and regular access to his family and lawyers of his choice;
 3. Calls on the Saudi authorities to release unconditionally Raif Badawi's lawyer, and all human rights defenders and other prisoners of conscience detained and sentenced for merely exercising their right to freedom of expression;
 4. Condemns firmly all forms of corporal punishment as unacceptable and degrading treatment contrary to human dignity and voices concern about states' use of flogging, strongly calling for its strict abolition; calls on the Saudi authorities to respect the prohibition of torture, as is most notably enshrined in the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which Saudi Arabia has signed and ratified; calls on Saudi Arabia to sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
 5. Highlights the process of judicial reform undertaken by Saudi Arabia with a view to strengthening the possibility for improved protection of individual rights, but remains gravely concerned by the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia, which continues to rank among the most repressive countries in the world; considers the case of Raif Badawi a symbol of the assault on freedom of expression and peaceful dissent in the country, and more broadly of the Kingdom's characteristic policies of intolerance and extremist interpretation of Islamic law;
 6. Urges the Saudi authorities to abolish the Specialised Criminal Court, set up in 2008 to try terrorism cases but increasingly used to prosecute peaceful dissidents on apparently politically motivated charges and in proceedings that violate the fundamental right to a fair trial;
 7. Calls on the Saudi authorities to allow independent press and media and ensure freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly for all inhabitants of Saudi Arabia; condemns the repression of activists and protesters when they demonstrate peacefully; stresses that the peaceful advocacy of basic legal rights or making critical remarks using social media are expressions of an indispensable right;
 8. Reminds Saudi Arabia's leadership of its pledge to 'uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights' when it applied successfully for membership to the UN Human Rights Council in 2013;
 9. Believes that Saudi Arabia would be a more credible and effective partner in fighting terrorist organisations such as the so-called Islamic State and al-Qaeda if it did not engage in anachronistic and extremist practices, such as public beheadings, stoning and other forms of torture, similar to those committed by IS;
 10. Calls on the European External Action Service and the Commission to support, in an active and creative manner, civil society groups and individuals defending human rights in Saudi Arabia, including through the arrangement of prison visits, trial monitoring and public statements;
 11. Instructs its Delegation for Relations with the Arab Peninsula to raise the issue of Raif Badawi and the other prisoners of conscience during the course of its forthcoming visit to Saudi Arabia and to report back to its Subcommittee on Human Rights;
 12. Calls for the EU and its Member States to reconsider their relationship with Saudi Arabia, in a way that allows it to pursue its economic, energy and security interests, while not undermining the credibility of its core human rights commitments;
 13. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European External Action Service, the UN Secretary-General, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz, the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Secretary-General of the Centre for National Dialogue of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
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