

Democracy and human rights in Egypt

European Parliament

Human rights - 17-01-2008

In a resolution adopted on Egypt, MEPs call on the government of that country to take a range of measures to improve democracy and human rights, such as ending the harassment of journalists and human rights defenders, lifting the state of emergency, investigating suspected cases of torture and guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary.

Parliament first of all "recognises the role that Egypt plays in the Middle East peace process and the importance that EU-Egypt relations have for the entire Euro-Mediterranean area and in the fight against international terrorism and fundamentalism" but it then "points out that respect for human rights is a fundamental value of the EU-Egypt Association Agreement and reaffirms the importance of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership for promoting the rule of law and fundamental freedoms".

Government pressed to guarantee rights and freedoms

In the wake of "recent arrests and action against NGOs and human rights defenders", MEPs call on the government "to end all forms of harassment, including judicial measures, detention of media professionals and, more generally, human rights defenders" and to "respect freedom of expression, in conformity with Article 19 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which has been signed and ratified by Egypt".

The government is also urged to "honour its undertaking to lift the state of emergency on 31 May 2008", "to amend law No 25 of 1966 on martial courts" and to ensure that all measures adopted to fight terrorism are "fully in accordance with international human rights law".

Law on associations, judicial independence

The EP strongly backs academic, media and religious freedom. The need for independence of the judiciary is also stressed, as is protection of the freedoms of association and expression for judges, in line with UN principles.

MEPs want measures against trade union and human rights bodies to be rescinded and urge that "the law on associations should not impose arbitrary restrictions on the peaceful activities of civil society organisations". They call for the release of dissidents, including Kamal Abbas and Ayman Nour.

Rights for migrant workers

Migrant workers and their families should have their rights protected through implementation by Egypt of two relevant conventions, say MEPs, who also back a call by a UN committee for investigations into the killing of 27 Sudanese asylum-seekers in 2005 to be re-opened.

Torture allegations must be investigated

Urging an end to all forms of torture and ill-treatment, MEPs call on the government to allow a visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on torture.

Lastly, Parliament urges the EU to put human rights developments "very high on its agenda" during the forthcoming meeting of the EU-Egypt Subcommittee on Political Matters.

The resolution was adopted by 52 votes to 0, with 7 abstentions.