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**REGIONS:**

AFRICA

AMERICAS

ASIA

**Thailand**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the situation of Hmong refugees in Thailand (02/02/07)**

The European Union welcomes the fact that the Royal Thai Government has halted preparations to forcibly deport a group of 153 Hmongs to the Lao P.D.R on 30 January 2007. Most of those affected enjoy refugee status according to UNHCR procedures.

The European Union underlines that prior to 30 January 2007 several third countries had agreed to accept the 153 Hmongs for resettlement. **It considers the deportation of recognized refugees to be a clear violation of the internationally accepted principle of non-refoulement and calls on the Royal Thai Government to cooperate with UNHCR and those countries willing to accept Hmongs for resettlement in the interests of finding of a humanitarian solution to the problem.**

The European Union recognizes the difficult situation faced by the Kingdom of Thailand due to the large numbers of refugees on its territory. The European Union recalls that on several previous occasions the Royal Thai Government had expressed its determination to deal with the problem of refugees living in Thailand in accordance with humanitarian principles.

The European Union encourages the Royal Thai Government not to deviate from those principles. In this context, the European Union urges the Royal Thai Government to treat the Hmong refugees detained at Nong Khai and elsewhere as well as those living in the Ban Huay Nam Khao provisional shelter near Petchabun in accordance with those principles.

[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/cfsp/92629.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/cfsp/92629.pdf)

**India**

► European Parliament resolution on the human rights situation of the Dalits in India  
(01/02/07)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the hearing held by its Committee on Development on 18 December 2006,
- having regard to its resolution of 28 September 2006 on the EU's economic and trade relations with India<sup>(1)</sup> and Parliament's Human Rights Reports of 2000, 2002, 2003 and 2005,
- having regard to General Recommendation XXIX (descent-based discrimination) adopted by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on 22 August 2002 and the 48 measures to be taken by the State Parties,
- having regard to the study being undertaken by the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, in which draft Principles and Guidelines for the elimination of "discrimination based on work and descent" are being developed, and noting the preliminary report issued by the Special Rapporteurs on discrimination based on work and descent,
- having regard to the various provisions in the Constitution of India for the protection and promotion of the rights of Dalits, concerning at least 167 million people, including the provisions on the abolition of the practice of untouchability, the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of caste, equality of opportunity in matters of public employment and educational, employment and political affirmative action through reservations in State-run institutions and political representative bodies; having regard also to numerous legislative measures ordering the abolition of some of the worst practices of untouchability and caste discrimination, including bonded labour, manual scavenging and atrocities against Dalits,
- having regard to the National Human Rights Commission, the National and State Commissions for Scheduled Castes and the National Safai Karamchari Commission, dealing with the problem of manual scavenging,
- having regard to Rule 91 and Rule 90(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas India is the largest functioning democracy in the world where every citizen is equal before the ballot box, India's immediate past President and Head of State was a Dalit and Dalits have served as ministers; whereas there are Hindu schools of thought which reject caste discrimination and exclusion as an aberration of their faith,

B. whereas Dalits and similar groups are also found in Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh,

**C. whereas the National Human Rights Commission of India has reported that the implementation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act remains very unsatisfactory, and whereas it has published numerous recommendations to address this problem,**

**D. whereas, despite twenty-seven officially registered atrocities being committed against Dalits every day, police often prevent Dalits from entering police stations, refuse the registration of cases by Dalits and regularly resort to the practice of torture against Dalits with impunity,**

E. whereas, despite the fact that many Dalits do not report crimes for fear of reprisals by the dominant castes, official police statistics averaged over the past 5 years show that 13 Dalits are murdered every week, 5 Dalits' homes or possessions are burnt every week, 6 Dalits are kidnapped or abducted every week, 3 Dalit women are raped every day, 11 Dalits are beaten every day and a crime is committed against a Dalit every 18 minutes<sup>(2)</sup>.

F. whereas a recent study on untouchability in rural India(3) , covering 565 villages in 11 States, found that public health workers refused to visit Dalit homes in 33% of villages, Dalits were prevented from entering police stations in 27.6% of villages, Dalit children had to sit separately while eating in 37.8% of government schools, Dalits did not get mail delivered to their homes in 23.5% of villages, and Dalits were denied access to water sources in 48.4% of villages because of segregation and untouchability practices,

G. whereas half of India's Dalit children are undernourished, 21% are "severely underweight", and 12% die before their fifth birthday (4) ,

H. whereas untouchability in schools has contributed to far higher drop-out and illiteracy levels for Dalit children than those of the general population, with the "literacy gap" between Dalits and non-Dalits hardly changing since India's independence and literacy rates for Dalit women remaining as low as 37.8% in rural India(5) ,

I. **whereas Dalit women, who alongside "Tribal" women are the poorest of the poor in India, face double discrimination on the basis of caste and gender in all spheres of life, are subjected to gross violations of their physical integrity, including sexual abuse by dominant castes with impunity and are socially excluded and economically exploited,**

J. whereas the National Commission for Scheduled Castes has observed substantial under-allocation and under-expenditure of the allocation for Dalit welfare and development under the government's Special Component Plan for Scheduled Castes,

K. **whereas Dalits are subjected to bonded and forced labour and discriminated against in a range of markets, including in the labour, housing, consumer, capital and credit markets; are paid lower wages and subjected to longer working hours, delayed wages and verbal or physical abuse,**

1. Welcomes the various provisions in the Constitution of India for the protection and promotion of the rights of Dalits; notes however that, in spite of these provisions, implementation of laws protecting the rights of Dalits remains grossly inadequate, and that atrocities, untouchability, illiteracy, inequality of opportunity, manual scavenging, inadequacy of wages, bonded labour, child labour and landlessness continue to blight the lives of India's Dalits;

2. **Expresses its concern at the low rate of conviction for the perpetrators of such crimes and calls on the Government of India to improve its criminal justice system in order to facilitate registration of charges against perpetrators of crimes against Dalits, to increase the conviction rate for such perpetrators, to significantly reduce the duration of court procedures; and to take special measures for the protection of Dalit women;**

3. Welcomes the recent ban on the employment of children as domestic servants and workers in roadside eateries, restaurants, teashops etc. and urges the Indian Government to take further steps towards the complete banning of all forms of child labour;

4. Calls on the Government of India to take urgent steps to ensure equal access for Dalits to police stations and all other public institutions and facilities, including those related to its democratic structure such as panchayat buildings (the buildings housing local assemblies) and polling booths;

5. Applauds the fiscal policy followed by the Planning Commission of India and the various Ministries in the provision of the budgetary allocations towards the welfare and development of Dalits, and calls on the Government of India to ensure complete and time-bound implementation of all policy and budgetary measures towards the welfare and development of Dalits, including full implementation of the Special Component Plan for Scheduled Castes;

6. Urges the Government of India to engage further with relevant UN human rights bodies on the effective elimination of caste-based discrimination, including the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the UN Special Rapporteurs assigned to develop Principles and Guidelines for the Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent;

**7. Calls on the Government of India to ratify the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and to take preventive measures to reduce the risk of Dalits facing torture, to take legal measures to criminalise torture in India, to take punitive measures to prosecute police who commit torture, to consistently provide rehabilitation and compensation for torture victims and to put in place an independent complaints mechanism for victims of torture that is accessible to Dalits;**

8. Notes with concern the lack of substantive EU engagement with the Indian Government, notably within the EU-India Summits, on the vast problem of caste-based discrimination;

9. Urges the Council and the Commission to raise the issue of caste-based discrimination during EU-India Summits and other meetings as part of all political, human rights, civil society, development and trade dialogues and to inform the committees concerned of the progress and outcome of such dialogues;

10. Urges the EU members of the Joint Action Committee to develop dialogue on the problem of caste-based discrimination in terms of its discussions on democracy and human rights, social and employment policy and development cooperation;

11. Reiterates its expectation that EU development programmes in India include specific measures to ensure that minorities such as Dalits and Adivasis and other marginalised communities, tribes and castes, are able to close the wide gap with the rest of the population regarding the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals;

12. Recalls its demand that the Council and the Commission give priority to promoting equal opportunities in employment in private EU-based companies and encouraging EU-based companies to implement the "Ambedkar Principles" (Employment and Additional Principles on Economic and Social Exclusion Formulated to assist All Foreign Investors in South Asia to Address Caste Discrimination);

13. Welcomes the EU's commitment to the development of Principles and Guidelines for the Elimination of Discrimination on the basis of Work and Descent by the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, and urges the Commission and the Council to continue that support;

14. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments of the Member States, the President, the Government and Parliament of India, the UN Secretary-General, and the heads of the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, the International Labour Organization, the UNICEF, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0016+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

## **Kazakhstan**

► **OSCE: Statement of the European Union on Media Freedom in Kazakhstan** (01/02/07)

Freedom of the media is one of the central OSCE commitments in the human dimension. Indeed, media freedom, including the freedom to criticise those in power, even in an outspoken manner, is a hallmark of and a prerequisite for a functioning democracy.

**It is with concern, therefore, that the EU has learnt of the two-year suspended sentence handed down to Kazakh journalist Kazis Toguzbaev on January 22 on charges of infringement on the honour and dignity of the country's president brought against him by the National Security Committee under article 318 of the Penal Code. In July 2006 another journalist, Zharsaral Kuanyshalin, was given a similar sentence on charges under the same paragraph of the Penal Code. This raises fears of a negative trend in Kazakhstan in this regard.**

The EU calls on Kazakhstan to take up the offer of the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media to assist in bringing legal practice relevant to the media and freedom of expression in line with international standards and best practice. We hope that any future legal amendments being considered by Parliament in this respect will not lead to a further strengthening of legislation against defamation in Kazakhstan. We also hope that discussions on the new draft media law will soon be resumed by Parliament and will lead to tangible improvements of the media legislation in Kazakhstan. We should appreciate any information the Kazakh delegation can offer about plans for amending media-relevant legislation, including the draft law on "publishing activities" introducing a licensing scheme for all printing activities.

[http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/Statements\\_in\\_International\\_Organisations/February/0201OSCEKazakhstan.html](http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/Statements_in_International_Organisations/February/0201OSCEKazakhstan.html)

## EUROPE (OUTSIDE OF UE) AND CIS

### Russia

- ▶ **OSCE: Statement of the European Union on the Closure of the Russian Chechen Friendship Society** (01/02/07)

**The European Union has learnt with deep regret of the coercive closure of the Russian Chechen Friendship Society (RCFS), following the denial of an appeal by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation on 23 January against a judicial order passed on 13 October 2006.**

The Russian Chechen Friendship Society, laureate of the 2004 Recognition Award of the International Helsinki Federation, was one of the few remaining organisations in Russia reporting on human rights conditions in Chechnya and the Northern Caucasus. The EU has previously raised the harassment of this non-governmental organisation, inter alia in the context of the murder of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, with whom the Russian Chechen Friendship Society had co-operated closely.

This case shows that the "Federal Law on Introducing Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation" of 17 April 2006, commonly referred to as "NGO law", as well as the "Law on Countering Extremist Activity" can be implemented in an arbitrary manner.

We are concerned that the new legislation on 'extremism' – especially given the potentially wide interpretation of this legal term - might have further negative effects on the legitimate activity of civil society organisations in Russia.

The EU considers the full and practical recognition of the positive role played by NGOs and human rights defenders in promoting peaceful solutions to political and social conflicts an essential element of our shared values.

The EU takes note of the fact that NGOs have repeatedly reported about problems they face as a result of the new legislation. The EU will follow closely the implementation of these laws. We appeal to the Russian authorities to consider whether the experience so far calls for amendments to the laws or adjustments to their implementation in the light of standards and commitments undertaken in the framework of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and we stand ready to work together with the Russian Federation on this.

[http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/Statements\\_in\\_International\\_Organisations/February/0201OSCERCFS.html](http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/Statements_in_International_Organisations/February/0201OSCERCFS.html)

## MAGHREB AND MIDDLE EAST

### Iraq

- ▶ **EU Presidency Statement on the suicide bombing in Baghdad on 3 February** (04/02/07)

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union is profoundly shocked by the suicide bombing in a crowded market-place in Baghdad, which left over 100 people dead, including many women and children, and over 200 injured. The Presidency condemns this brutal act in the strongest possible terms. To those who have lost loved ones it offers heartfelt condolences and to those who have been injured good wishes for a speedy recovery. It calls on all groups to take a determined stand against the ongoing violence in Iraq.

[http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/CFSP\\_Statements/February/0204Bagdad.html](http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/CFSP_Statements/February/0204Bagdad.html)

### Iran

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the imminent execution of three Ahwazi men in Iran** (01/02/07)

The European Union deplores the execution of four Ahwazi Arab men on 24 January sentenced to death in Iran for alleged involvement in terrorist activities in the Ahwaz region.

The EU has raised with the Iranian authorities its concerns about the conduct of the trial that led to these sentences and the defendants' lack of access to lawyers.

The EU calls on Iran to halt the executions of the remaining three men, to allow these men a fair and public hearing, and to ensure full openness and transparency in all court proceedings. **The EU reiterates its longstanding opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances.**

[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/cfsp/92611.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/cfsp/92611.pdf)

**THEMATIC :**

## FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES

## JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

## EXTERNAL RELATIONS & DEVELOPMENT-RELATED ISSUES

### German's EU Presidency

- ▶ Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on the occasion of the Third World Congress against the Death Penalty [Paris, 1 - 3 February 2007] (31/01/07)

**On the occasion of the Third World Congress against Death Penalty the EU reiterates its longstanding active opposition to the death penalty. The EU is at the forefront of abolitionist efforts around the world and will continue to oppose the death penalty in all cases and under all circumstances because it considers the death penalty to be a cruel and inhuman punishment.**

Furthermore, the death penalty provides no added value in terms of deterrence. Any miscarriage or failure of justice is irreversible, when, in a cruel and inhumane way, the punishment deprives one of his or her right to life. The EU is therefore convinced that the abolition of the death penalty contributes to the enhancement of human dignity and the progressive development of human rights.

Considerable progress has been made in global endeavours to abolish the death penalty over recent years, and the European Union is pleased to note that this positive trend towards universal abolition is continuing. Most recently, the European Union welcomed the abolition of the death penalty in the Philippines and Moldova in 2006 and positive developments towards its complete abolition in many other countries. Despite this progress, the fight against the death penalty is far from being won. Indeed, death sentences and executions remain all too frequent in many countries, even where there is a declining trend. The European Union is particularly concerned about the ongoing discussion in some abolitionist countries on restoring the death penalty in their legislation.

**The EU also expresses its absolute abhorrence at the fact that in a few countries - in clear violation of their international legal obligations - minors are still being sentenced to death and executed. The European Union also remains particularly concerned about the standards of justice which are used in the application of capital punishment. The fight against terrorism can never be a reason or justification for introducing or restoring the death penalty. Terrorism can be combated most effectively by adhering strictly to international law and respecting human rights.**

The European Union will continue its policy based on the Guidelines on the Death Penalty adopted in 1998 by the Council of the EU. The Guidelines have enabled the EU to develop a multi-faceted approach, in close cooperation with civil society. Therefore, and consistently with its Guidelines, the EU will intensify its initiatives in international fora, including the United Nations. In doing so, the EU will continue to reflect on how its actions can be further enhanced.

In this regard, the EU recalls the Statement of 19 December 2006 on the Death Penalty delivered in the General Assembly of the United Nations at the initiative of the EU and signed by 85 countries from all geographical groups. Opposition to the death penalty is not defined by regional or cultural borders, but is embedded within a global commitment to human rights and dignity.

The European Union therefore calls on the governments of all countries which still retain the death penalty to work towards the abolition of the death penalty under all circumstances. As a first step towards this goal,

the EU calls on the governments concerned to introduce a moratorium on the death penalty with immediate effect.

[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/cfsp/92602.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/cfsp/92602.pdf)

## **European Parliament**

### ► **Death penalty - MEPs set to back International moratorium** (31/01/07)

Death by beheading, electrocution, hanging and a firing squad: all deeply repulsive and legal ways to die in many countries around the world. Amnesty International reports that in 2005 over 2,100 people were executed in 22 countries. This week MEPs are set to add their support for a UN sponsored international moratorium on executions. A debate and resolution on Wednesday and Thursday are likely to demand an immediate and unconditional halt to executions.

### **2007 Congress against the death penalty**

Later in the week a cross-party delegation of MEPs will attend the "World Congress Against the Death Penalty" in Paris. This is the 3rd such meeting - the first being held in the Parliament in Strasbourg in 2001.

The aim is to discuss ways of persuading countries to end executions and put pressure on them to halt executions. The organisers have organised a petition to the Chinese government asking them to show an "Olympic spirit" and halt executions prior to the 2008 Olympics Games in Beijing. Ahead of the visit one member of Parliament's delegation - Roberta Anastase of the European People's Party said the Parliament is "acting today to promote human rights, to impose a ban on the death penalty...to envisage the value of every human being".

### **International pressure**

The foundation stone of the anti-death penalty case is the UN's 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights guaranteeing the "right to life, liberty and security of person..." On the 50th anniversary of this declaration in 1998 the EU reaffirmed its commitment to these principles. None of the current 27 states of the Union currently has the death penalty. Just last week MEPs unanimously voted to support a resolution that called for the overturning of death sentences against 5 Bulgarian nurses and 1 Palestinian doctor in Libya. They were convicted in 2004 for allegedly infecting 400 children with the AIDS virus in a Benghazi hospital. The medics have always said they are being made scapegoats for failures in the Libyan health system.

### **A world divided over death**

The international community is roughly divided into four groups towards the death penalty. The first group are the 88 states that have abolished the penalty. The second are the 11 countries that retain it for "special" crimes such as those committed under military law for example. The third group - 29 countries - such as Morocco and Algeria - that retain the penalty but have not executed anyone for 10 years. Finally, the last group of 69 states and territories that maintain and carry out the death penalty. This includes the US, China, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan.

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story\\_page/015-2573-029-01-05-902-20070130STO02572-2007-29-01-2007/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/015-2573-029-01-05-902-20070130STO02572-2007-29-01-2007/default_en.htm)

## **European Parliament**

### ► **European Parliament resolution on the initiative in favour of a universal moratorium on the death penalty** (01/02/07)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on a universal moratorium on the death penalty, in particular those of 23 October 2003(1) , 6 May 1999(2) and 18 June 1998(3) ,
- having regard to the resolutions on the moratorium on capital punishment adopted by various UN bodies, including the UN Commission on Human Rights,
- having regard to the EU's statements in support of a universal moratorium on capital punishment and the statement on abolition of the death penalty delivered on 19 December 2006 in the UN General Assembly, which was signed by 85 countries from all geographical groups,
- having regard to the Guidelines on EU policy towards third countries on the death penalty of 3 June 1998,
- having regard to Rule 103(4) of the Rules of Procedure,

- A. **whereas the death penalty is a cruel and inhuman punishment and a violation of the right to life,**
- B. **whereas the abolition of the death penalty is a fundamental value of the European Union and a requirement for countries seeking EU membership,**

C. deeply concerned by the fact that national laws still exist, or have been reintroduced, in dozens of countries around the world, providing for the death penalty and allowing the execution of thousands of human beings each year,

D. whereas, at the same time, progress towards the worldwide abolition of the death penalty continues; whereas the complete abolition of the death penalty in Liberia, Mexico, the Philippines and Moldova during the past years and the rejection by the Peruvian Congress of a draft law introducing the death penalty for crimes of terrorism are to be welcomed,

E. whereas the EU decided, in the framework of its Guidelines on EU policy towards third countries on the death penalty, to work within international bodies towards the abolition of the death penalty,

F. whereas on 9 January 2007 the Italian Government and the Council of Europe decided to work together to gather as much support as possible for the current UN General Assembly-based initiative for a worldwide moratorium on executions, with a view to full abolition of the death penalty,

G. whereas on 27 July 2006 the Italian Chamber of Deputies unanimously adopted a resolution calling on the Italian Government to present to the next UN General Assembly, after consulting its EU partners, but without being subject to unanimous approval, a motion for a resolution for a universal moratorium on the death penalty, with a view to completely abolishing the death penalty throughout the world; and whereas at its meeting of 22 January 2007 the EU's General Affairs Council agreed that in New York the German Presidency of the EU would assess the opportunities and ways of reopening discussions on and consideration of the proposal for a universal moratorium on the death penalty,

H. condemning the execution of Saddam Hussein and the media's exploitation of his hanging, and deploring the way it was carried out,

**1. Reiterates its long-standing position against the death penalty in all cases and under all circumstances and expresses once more its conviction that the abolition of the death penalty contributes to the enhancement of human dignity and to the progressive development of human rights;**

2. **Calls for a worldwide moratorium on executions to be established immediately and unconditionally with a view to the worldwide abolition of the death penalty, through a relevant resolution of the current UN General Assembly, whose actual implementation the UN Secretary-General should be able to monitor;**

3. Calls on the EU Presidency to take appropriate action as a matter of urgency to ensure that such a resolution is urgently submitted to the current UN General Assembly; calls on the EU Presidency and the Commission to keep Parliament informed of the results achieved in the current UN General Assembly in relation to a universal moratorium on the death penalty;

4. Urges the EU institutions and the Member States to make every endeavour in the political and diplomatic spheres to ensure the success of this resolution within the current UN General Assembly;

5. Strongly supports the initiative of the Italian Chamber of Deputies and Government backed by the EU Council, the Commission and the Council of Europe;

6. Strongly urges all EU Member States to ratify without delay the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), aiming at the complete abolition of the death penalty;

7. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the UN Secretary-General, the Chair of the UN General Assembly and all the UN member states.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0018+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

## EU / UN REFORM

## MISCELLANEOUS

### OSCE

- ▶ **OSCE: Statement of the European Union in Response to the Report of the Director of ODIHR, Ambassador Christian Strohal** (01/02/07)

*648th Meeting of the Permanent Council*

On behalf of the EU, I should like to warmly welcome Ambassador Strohal to the Permanent Council and thank him for his presentation. The OSCE can look back on a rich year in the area of human dimension activities. We express our gratitude to the ODIHR Director and staff for their dedicated work.

The EU welcomes the comprehensive programme of activities planned by ODIHR for 2007 as well as the Office's continued assistance to the participating States. MC Decision 19/06 on "Strengthening the Effectiveness of the OSCE" and the other human dimension-related decisions adopted by the Ministerial Council in Brussels, which underline again the crucial importance of implementation of commitments, give clear guidance on the way forward. The EU will spare no effort to stimulate the political will to address the remaining challenges in the implementation of commitments. The EU is open to considering new commitments as appropriate.

During the past year, ODIHR election observation activities have once again constituted an important and highly visible part of the OSCE's work. The EU highly values ODIHR's professional election observation methodology, which provides a sound basis for the assistance offered to the participating states, when

necessary. ODIHR's long-standing, well established expertise is indispensable for the maintenance of the highest standards of OSCE election observation. Its methodology is based on a consistent and systematic fact-based approach, which constitutes an essential prerequisite to arrive at objective conclusions.

We welcome the fact that an increasing number of participating States, in line with their Copenhagen commitments, invite ODIHR to observe their elections. The EU encourages all participating States to continue seconding observers, thereby contributing to a geographically balanced composition of ODIHR election observation missions.

Combating all forms of intolerance and discrimination must continue to receive great attention by our organisation. The EU will actively support the implementation of the relevant Ministerial Decision adopted in Brussels. We thank ODIHR for its valuable support and assistance in the past year's tolerance-related events and for its continuing efforts in this field, including the strengthening of its Tolerance and Non-Discrimination programme. We commend ODIHR for its work on monitoring Hate-Motivated Incidents and encourage the planned increase of efforts in this area during 2007.

We emphasise the need for implementation of the three OSCE Action Plans, namely on: improving the situation for Roma and Sinti, combating trafficking in human beings and promoting gender equality. We have taken careful note of Ambassador Strohal's reference to the Action Plans, and also wish to extend a warm welcome to Mr Andrzej Mirga, as the new ODIHR Contact Point Senior Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues.

The EU gives its full support to the continued work of the Democratization and Human Rights Programmes, as outlined by Ambassador Strohal. The overarching objective of ODIHR's thematic programmes is to support the participating States in implementing their Human Dimension commitments. We encourage all participating States to take full advantage of the expertise provided by ODIHR.

The Human Dimension meetings calendar is currently being elaborated. The EU welcomes and supports the choice of topics for 2007 as proposed by the Chairman-in-Office.

The EU would like to use this opportunity to stress again the importance of adhering to international obligations on human rights and the rule of law under all circumstances, including in the fight against terrorism. The EU calls on participating States to support initiatives aiming at bringing forward work on Human rights defenders and Independent National Human Rights Institutions. We therefore fully support the proposal by the Chairman-in-Office to devote a day of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting to the specific topic of "Human rights defenders and independent national human rights institutions". The EU would also like to reiterate its strong support for the legitimate and peaceful activities of civil society. States should not misuse legal and administrative provisions for exercising politically motivated pressure on NGOs. We appreciate the continuing efforts of ODIHR to address problems faced by civil society and are happy to note the establishment of an ODIHR Focal Point to meet these concerns.

Finally, we wish the Director and his staff all the best as they continue their highly demanding tasks within the human dimension. Ambassador Strohal and ODIHR can continue to count on the full support of the EU.

[http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/Statements\\_in\\_International\\_Organisations/February/0201OSCEODIHR.html](http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/Statements_in_International_Organisations/February/0201OSCEODIHR.html)