



IMMEDIATE RELEASE 12/03/2015

European Parliament Intergroup welcomes the adoption of EP human rights report and Emergency Resolution on attacks against Assyrians

*The report however neglects to mention a wider range of religious or belief groups*

The European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance welcomes the adoption by the European Parliament of its Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy and the Emergency Resolution on 'Recent attacks and abductions by Daesh in the Middle East, notably of Assyrians' in the Strasbourg plenary session.

The chapter on freedom of religion or belief in the Annual Human Rights and Democracy report and the Emergency Resolution reinforces the Parliament's commitment to protecting religious or belief minorities in the world. Intergroup Co-President Dennis De Jong said *'I welcome the report and the emergency resolution which clearly set out the Parliament's position in regards to FoRB and contain recommendations for the European External Action Service (EEAS) on mainstreaming human rights and freedom of religion or belief in EU foreign policy.'*

The report included for the third consecutive year a detailed section on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). Although the Intergroup is pleased to see the inclusion of paragraphs on persecution of religious or belief minorities by ISIS, Christian persecution and the continued systemic human rights violations of Rohingya Muslims in Burma, the Intergroup is concerned by the omission of the persecution of other religious or belief minorities such as Baha'is, Hindus, atheists and other religious or belief minorities. The Intergroup reiterates that freedom of religion or belief is one and the same right for all.

The inclusion of the section on FoRB was in part due to the amendments tabled by the Intergroup which were supported by other Members of European Parliament. In particular the Intergroup amendments included calling for the 'High Representative/Vice President and the EEAS to engage in a permanent dialogue with NGOs, religious or belief groups and religious leaders' and for the European Union (EU) to promote 'freedom of religion or belief within international and regional fora including the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe (CoE) and other regional mechanisms.' Intergroup Co-President Peter van Dalen added *'The inclusion of these important amendments highlight the importance of the Conference of Presidents decision to upgrade the Working Group to an Intergroup and the significant role the Intergroup can play in promoting FoRB from within the European Parliament.'*

At the same time the Intergroup expressed disappointment that two of its amendments were not accepted, notably an appeal for the ‘the EEAS and Member States to involve representatives from the European Parliament and from civil society in FoRB trainings’ and for ‘the EEAS to establish a horizontal focal point for religion or belief matters.’ Both amendments were recommended by the European Parliament Working Group on FoRB in its 2013 annual report.

Although these amendments were not approved, the Intergroup will continue to promote these recommendations in future reports and resolutions of the Parliament.