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3. HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE WORLD

LEGAL BASIS: Preamble of EEC Treaty; UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights; Final Act of Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Helsinki 1975.

OBJECTIVES: To seek to ensure respect for human rights in the world, and particularly in the signatory countries of the Final Act of Helsinki.

ACHIEVEMENTS: The Foreign Ministers meeting in political cooperation have made frequent approaches to governments of third countries in an attempt to secure respect for the human rights either of groups of people or of individuals. These approaches are usually made by diplomatic contact and are thus not publicised, but have had some success since 1979. Many were made in response to resolutions adopted by the EP. At a public hearing on Human Rights in the World, organised by the Political Committee in April 1983, the Secretary General of Amnesty International asked the EP to continue and extend its work on human rights, which was of much value.

In negotiating the commercial arrangements between the Community and a third country the Council and Commission may draw attention to violations of human rights, particularly if asked to do so by the European Parliament. For example, the European Parliament in April 1981 called on the Community institutions to fulfil their responsibilities under the European Convention on Human Rights by suspending the Association Agreement between the EEC and Turkey unless within two months steps had been taken to return to democratic institutions and practices; as a result, the Agreement remains suspended in September 1983. In a further resolution in July 1982 the EP urged the Commission and Council not to adopt the Fourth EEC-Turkey Financial Protocol until free elections had been held in Turkey.

ROLE OF EP: The Political Affairs Committee of the EP set up in 1980 a Working Group on Human Rights, which in 1982 adopted a report on human rights in the world. The general report was backed by six reports dealing with the situation on human rights in different groups of countries. Both the general and the particular reports set out and condemned violations of human rights and called for action by the Foreign Ministers, the Commission and by Parliament in order to increase respect for human rights. Parliament adopted a resolution on the subject in April 1983.

One particular point made was that the Commission and Council should, during the negotiations for renewal of the Lomé Convention, press for the protection of human rights to be enshrined in the Convention. The EP Delegation to the Joint Assembly of the EEC and ACP countries at Kingston, Jamaica in 1983 had a debate on that subject.

In addition to these reports the EP has since the early 1970s adopted resolutions on human rights in the world in response to particular situations or to the plight of individuals. Increasingly, the EP has asked its delegations to other Parliaments to bring up the subject of human rights and freedoms at their meetings. This has been done by EP delegations to the Latin American Parliament, the ASEAN countries' Parliaments, China and India, among other countries.

Whereas objections have in the past been raised by the delegations from other Parliaments to the discussion of human rights as being an internal matter, the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act and the follow-up meetings at Belgrade and Madrid, together with discussions on human rights in international fora, have done much to remove such objections. (see Fact sheet II/A/2).

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In resolutions, oral and written questions to the Commission, Council and Foreign Ministers and in response to petitions, the EP has used its influence in many and varied ways in a continuing effort to secure respect for human rights in the world. Since direct elections in 1979, the EP has adopted 81 resolutions on human rights. Members have asked 146 questions at question time and 166 questions for written answer; 89 petitions on respect for human rights have been received and dealt with.

The following examples can be quoted of resolutions adopted on human rights:-

- various aspects of the situation in Poland since August 1980 (several resolutions)
- arrests in Czechoslovakia
- assassination of trade unionists in several countries
- violations of human rights in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua
- Argentina - 'disappeared persons', and Uruguay
- Afghanistan - several resolutions on the Soviet invasion
- the plight of refugees in the S. China Sea (boat people) and the Horn of Africa
- the plight of Soviet Jews
- the situation in Southern Africa
- Women's rights
- protection of ethnic and linguistic minorities.