



Situation of human rights defenders worldwide

Rede von Annette Groth, 03. Dezember 2015

Drucksache 18/6880

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues,

The plight of human-rights defenders has worsened significantly in many countries over the past few years, according to the report recently published by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

Although Germany supports the EU guidelines on human rights defenders, updated in 2008, all efforts by the Opposition to improve the organisational resources available at the Federal Foreign Office have been rejected.

I would like to give just a few examples demonstrating how difficult the work of human rights defenders is:

One of the countries in which there is systematic persecution of human rights defenders is Saudi Arabia. According to Amnesty International, at least 151 people have already been executed there this year.

In October, the Supreme Court confirmed the death

sentences against Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, his nephew and two minors. Those sentenced to death had participated in peaceful protests against the Sunni royal family in 2009 and campaigned for an end to discrimination against the Shia community in Saudi Arabia.

A week ago, Saudi-born Palestinian poet Ashraf Fayadh was sentenced to death. Fayadh is regarded as one of the most important voices on the Saudi arts scene and has curated many exhibitions both within Saudi Arabia and abroad. The 23-year-old was arrested two years ago and sentenced to death in mid-November for renouncing Islam. I hope that a broad wave of international protest will be able to save his life and that you on the government benches will also exert pressure on the Saudi government.

It is scandalous that the Federal Government is still supplying weapons to Saudi Arabia. This must finally stop. You all know that many Saudi families are amongst the biggest sources of support for IS. And, alongside Qatar, Turkey is also a provider of support, as is now well documented.

It is scandalous that the EU and the Federal Government are not loudly condemning the attacks by the Turkish state on the Kurdish civilian population. Instead of effectively fighting IS and ceasing to allow IS fighters to cross the Turkish border to Syria, for example, the Turkish armed forces are mainly directing their efforts against the Kurds. Only a few days ago, prominent human rights lawyer Tahir Elci – who had only shortly beforehand called for peace in the region – was shot dead.

Colleagues, you must finally unequivocally condemn the human rights violations being committed by the Turkish police and armed forces against Kurdish and Turkish opposition activists, journalists and human rights defenders and demand their immediate

cessation. Instead, you and the EU are courting the Turkish government and cooperating with it in keeping out refugees - this is an unprecedented scandal!

In this context, Syrian Bishop Mirkis of Kirkuk, whom some of us met on Monday with representatives from the German Bishops Conference, also spoke of the "dirty money" that the EU is now making available to Turkey to look after the refugees there.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

on 16 November, two United Nations special rapporteurs called for respect for human rights and an end to the violence in Israel and Palestine. This appeal was prompted by the murder of a Palestinian in a hospital in Hebron. The Israeli undercover agents had stormed the hospital "disguised as Palestinians". What was particularly perfidious in this case was the fact that, according to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, one of the agents was disguised as a pregnant Palestinian woman, allowing the agents to enter the hospital much more easily.

Since 1 October, approximately 100 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli armed forces or through violence from settlers, with over 9000 injured.

Nineteen Jewish Israelis have been killed in Palestinian attacks and over 100 injured.

The Israeli authorities react with repressive measures like administrative detention even to peaceful vigils and demonstrations. This form of detention, which contravenes international law, involves holding the accused in custody without charges being brought or a trial taking place. The administrative detention order can be renewed again and again, so that those detained never know how long they will have to stay in prison. Since the beginning of October, 2650 Palestinians have been arrested, eighty per cent of

them minors.

Human rights defenders are often amongst those placed in administrative detention. In March 2014, human rights lawyer Shireen Issawi was placed in administrative detention. Issawi has campaigned with great commitment on behalf of Palestinian prisoners and has been involved in many activities related to human rights.

Administrative detention is part of an Israeli policy of occupation which involves trampling on the human rights of the Palestinians on an everyday basis.

For many years, not only Palestinian human rights defenders, but also many Jewish activists both within Israel and abroad have been calling for an end to weapons exports to Israel and the whole of the region. Our Basic Law prohibits weapons exports to conflict regions – surely, it is time to actually abide by this!

Another country in which human rights are systematically violated and human rights defenders subject to repression, which your motion too leaves more or less unmentioned, is Bahrain.

Opposition politicians and especially journalists are often detained for long periods without being charged. The most recent victim is the award-winning photographer Sayed Ahmed al-Mousawi, who was last week sentenced to ten years in prison. He and twelve other Bahrainis had their citizenship revoked, on the grounds of allegedly being members of terrorist groups and for taking part in demonstrations in early 2009.

Dear Colleagues,

this motion has a fundamental flaw. It wholly fails to mention the situation of human rights defenders in Germany. Numerous anti-racist and anti-fascist

initiatives are involved in campaigning for the rights of refugees and minorities and are criminalised by the police or courts. Active supporters of refugees are subject to surveillance by the intelligence services and hampered in their work.

There is urgent need for action here in Germany too!

The time of tabling non-committal motions should finally come to an end. What we need are concrete actions. I therefore call on you to finally cease military and police cooperation with dictatorial regimes which wholly disregard human rights. Weapons exports to dictatorships and governments which persecute human rights defenders and subject them to repression must finally be ended.

Thank you for your attention.