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PRESS RELEASE

European Parliament fails its human rights commitments

Brussels 3 December, 2001

Amnesty International, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) have sent an urgent appeal to the European Parliament to reconsider its decision not to create a fully-fledged Human Rights Committee. This follows the preliminary decision of the Conference of Presidents (of the political groups) on the composition of EP Committees for the second half of the legislature, which still needs to be confirmed by the Plenary of the Parliament on December 12.

The absence of an adequate structure dealing with human rights across a wide range of EU activity is a weakness, which seriously affects the Parliament's human rights work and the mid-term review constitutes a good occasion to address these sorts of shortcomings.

Amnesty International, FIDH and Human Rights Watch have been urging the European Parliament since November 2000 to address its structural failure on human rights, eventually proposing the creation of a fully-fledged Human Rights Committee.

The European Parliament claims a leading role in keeping human rights at the forefront of the EU agenda. However, this claim more reflects the past than the present. The Parliament's role regarding human rights has been reduced to ad hoc activism, resolutions and missions. It has failed to ensure proper control of Council and Commission activities in the ever-expanding human rights mandate of the EU. The almost complete absence of scrutiny is particularly disturbing in light of the EP's commitment to the Charter on Fundamental Rights and the new human rights challenges following the 11 September attacks in the US.

Among the structural problems of the Parliament:

- The EP's Foreign Affairs Committee is overburdened, giving priority to enlargement and defence issues and only marginally addressing human rights;
- The informal human rights working group has no institutional status and lacks basic resources to provide meaningful input;
- The Development Committee's Vice-President responsible for human rights is left to fend on her own without adequate administrative expertise and support;
- Coordination and cooperation of these two bodies with the Civil Liberties Committee is virtually non-existent.

Although members of all political groups share the concern, interest in tackling the problem has been limited.

The three human rights organizations urge the European Parliament to take the necessary measures to guarantee coherent and consistent accountability of EU human rights policy, an issue at the heart of its responsibility as the directly elected representative of EU citizens.

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