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TEXTS ADOPTED

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**P9\_TA(2022)0137**

**Persecution of minorities on the grounds of belief or religion**

**European Parliament resolution of 3 May 2022 on the persecution of minorities on the grounds of belief or religion (2021/2055(INI))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to Articles 2, 18 and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- having regard to Articles 2, 4, 18, 24, 26 and 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
- having regard to Articles 2 and 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,
- having regard to Articles 6 and 21 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
- having regard to Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to Articles 10, 14, 21 and 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, to Article 2 of the first Protocol thereto, and to Article 12 of Protocol No 12 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,
- having regard to the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,
- having regard to the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women,
- having regard to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court,
- having regard to the Declaration of 25 November 1981 of the UN General Assembly on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief,

- having regard to the Declaration of 18 December 1992 of the UN General Assembly on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities,
- having regard to the UN Human Rights Council resolution of 24 March 2011 on combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatisation of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief,
- having regard to the Rabat Plan of Action of 5 October 2012, on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence,
- having regard to the decision of the UN General Assembly designating 22 August as the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Belief or religion, adopted on 28 May 2019,
- having regard to the UN General Assembly resolution of 21 January 2021 on promoting a culture of peace and tolerance to safeguard religious sites,
- having regard to the reports of 15 July 2019 and 3 March 2021 of the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues to the UN Human Rights Council, addressing in particular respectively the concept of a ‘minority’ and the widespread targeting of minorities through hate speech in social media,
- having regard to the report of 12 October 2020 of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, addressing the importance of safeguarding freedom of religion or belief for all for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and how persons belonging to religious or belief minorities are at risk of ‘being left behind’,
- having regard to the annual report of 28 December 2020 of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities,
- having regard to the Marrakesh Declaration of 27 January 2016 on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 16 November 2009 on freedom of religion or belief,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 21 February 2011 on intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion or belief,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 22 February 2021 on EU priorities in UN Human Rights Fora in 2021,
- having regard to the EU Guidelines of 24 June 2013 on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief,
- having regard to the EU Human Rights Guidelines of 18 March 2019 on non-discrimination in external action,

- having regard to the reports from the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU,
- having regard to the 2020-24 EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, to be funded under the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework,
- having regard to the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (COM(2018)0460), and to the amended proposal thereon (COM(2020)0459),
- having regard to the awarding of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Raif Badawi in 2015, Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar in 2016 and Ilham Tohti in 2019,
- having regard to its resolution of 10 October 2013 on caste-based discrimination<sup>1</sup>, in particular paragraph 6 thereof on religion as an intersectional factor in discrimination and abuse,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2019 on EU Guidelines and the mandate of the EU Special Envoy on the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 4 February 2016 on the systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh'<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 4 July 2017 on addressing human rights violations in the context of war crimes, and crimes against humanity, including genocide<sup>4</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 March 2018 on the situation in Syria<sup>5</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 4 October 2018 on mass arbitrary detention of Uyghurs and Kazakhs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region<sup>6</sup>, 18 April 2019 on China, notably the situation of religious and ethnic minorities<sup>7</sup>, 19 December 2019 on the situation of the Uyghurs in China (China Cables)<sup>8</sup> and 17 December 2020 on forced labour and the situation of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region<sup>9</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 181, 19.5.2016, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 411, 27.11.2020, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 35, 31.1.2018, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> OJ C 334, 19.9.2018, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> OJ C 162, 10.5.2019, p. 119.

<sup>6</sup> OJ C 11, 13.1.2020, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> OJ C 158, 30.4.2021, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> OJ C 255, 29.6.2021, p. 60.

<sup>9</sup> OJ C 445, 29.10.2021, p. 114.

- having regard to its resolutions of 7 July<sup>1</sup> and 15 December 2016<sup>2</sup>, 14 September<sup>3</sup> and 14 December 2017<sup>4</sup>, and 19 September 2019<sup>5</sup> on Myanmar and the situation of the Rohingya people,
- having regard to its resolutions of 28 November 2019 on the situation of freedoms in Algeria<sup>6</sup> and 26 November 2020 on the deteriorating situation of human rights in Algeria, in particular the case of journalist Khaled Drareni<sup>7</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 19 December 2019 on violations of human rights including religious freedoms in Burkina Faso<sup>8</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 January 2020 on Nigeria, notably the recent terrorist attacks<sup>9</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 29 April 2021 on blasphemy laws in Pakistan, in particular the case of Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel<sup>10</sup>, and in which the case of Asia Bibi is also cited, 14 April 2016 on Pakistan, in particular the attack in Lahore<sup>11</sup>, and 13 December 2018 on Iran, notably the case of Nasrin Sotoudeh<sup>12</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 25 November 2020 on the foreign policy consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak<sup>13</sup>,
- having regard to its recommendation of 29 April 2021 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy concerning EU-India relations<sup>14</sup>,
- having regard to its recommendation of 9 June 2021 to the Council on the 75th and 76th sessions of the United Nations General Assembly<sup>15</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2020 on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter – annual report 2018<sup>16</sup>, in particular paragraphs 42, 43 and 45 thereof,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 101, 16.3.2018, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 238, 6.7.2018, p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 337, 20.9.2018, p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> OJ C 369, 11.10.2018, p. 91.

<sup>5</sup> OJ C 171, 6.5.2021, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> OJ C 232, 16.6.2021, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> OJ C 425, 20.10.2021, p. 126.

<sup>8</sup> OJ C 255, 29.6.2021, p. 45.

<sup>9</sup> OJ C 270, 7.7.2021, p. 83.

<sup>10</sup> OJ C 506, 15.12.2021, p. 77.

<sup>11</sup> OJ C 58, 15.2.2018, p. 151.

<sup>12</sup> OJ C 388, 13.11.2020, p. 127.

<sup>13</sup> OJ C 425, 20.10.2021, p. 63.

<sup>14</sup> OJ C 506, 15.12.2021, p. 109.

<sup>15</sup> OJ C 67, 8.2.2022, p. 150.

<sup>16</sup> OJ C 270, 7.7.2021, p. 25.

- having regard to its resolution of 20 January 2021 on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter – annual report 2019<sup>1</sup> , in particular paragraphs 103, 104, 106 and 107 thereof,
  - having regard to the activities of the European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance,
  - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Development,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0071/2022),
- A. whereas UN human rights treaties, together with international and EU laws, provide standards for the protection of the rights of persons belonging to belief or religious minorities as an integral part of human rights;
  - B. whereas the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion includes the freedom to choose what to believe or not to believe, the freedom to found, adhere to, change or abandon a religion or belief without any constraints, and the freedom, either individually or within a community and either privately or publicly, to express one’s religion or belief with regard to worship, teaching, practice and observance; whereas this freedom also entails the right for religious, secular and non-confessional organisations to have recognised legal personality; whereas freedom of religion or belief also includes the right to express critical or satirical opinions on religions and religious authorities as a legitimate expression of freedom of thought or artistic creation;
  - C. whereas according to Article 21 TEU, the EU promotes and defends respect for human dignity and the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as part of the guiding principles of its foreign policy;
  - D. whereas freedom of religion or belief is violated in a considerable number of countries worldwide; whereas a large number of people live in countries that impose or tolerate severe violations of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief;
  - E. whereas discrimination against and persecution of minorities on the grounds of belief or religion is carried out by different actors – whether by states, non-states actors or a combination of both – and can take different forms, such as killings, torture, physical attacks, mass incarceration, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, coercion, forced conversions, kidnappings, early and forced marriages, gender-based violence, rape, physical and mental abuse, forced birth control use and abortions, forced labour and displacement, human trafficking, threats, exclusion, discriminatory and unfair treatment, harassment, expropriation, limitations on access to citizenship, elected office, employment, education, health and administrative services, the destruction of places of worship, cemeteries and cultural heritage, and offline and online hate speech;
  - F. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated persecution and violence against belief and religious minorities in some countries; whereas furthermore the health crisis has provided some countries with a pretext to adopt persecutory measures for purposes

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 456, 10.11.2021, p. 94.

unrelated to the pandemic; whereas belief and religious minorities have become particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 infections and deaths due to unequal access to adequate medical care;

- G. whereas women belonging to belief or religious minorities are particularly at risk of increased discrimination and violence, both of which are linked to intersectional factors such as gender, religion, caste, ethnic background, power imbalances and patriarchy, and in some cases are justified by religious or belief motivations; whereas they face more difficulties in exercising their right to leave a religious or belief community due to lack of social or economic independence, threats of violence or loss of custody of their children;
- H. whereas gender-based violence and discrimination grounded in religious justifications persist; whereas women and LGBTIQ+ people continue to experience discrimination and violence inflicted in the name of religion by both state and non-state actors; whereas sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including abortion, are being banned in the name of religion by both state and non-state actors;
- I. whereas any persecution on the basis of religion or belief deserves the utmost condemnation and swift reactions from national governments and international actors;
- J. whereas the practices relating to indigenous beliefs or religions are part of a people's cultural identity; whereas indigenous peoples have the right to promote, develop and maintain their institutional structures and distinctive customs, spirituality, traditions, procedures and practices according to international human rights standards;
- K. whereas in almost every region in the world, religious minorities appear to be at risk of being designated 'terrorist groups' and of having members arrested under charges of 'extremism' or 'illegal activity'; whereas some governments are using national security imperatives and counter-terrorism measures to criminalise membership in or the activities of certain religious or belief groups; whereas such approaches severely undermine the exercise of the right to freedom of religion or belief;
- L. whereas belief or religious minorities often lack adequate national representation; whereas legislation often excludes the needs and interests of these minorities, with governments employing a range of extra-legal measures that persecute, delegitimise or stigmatise these minorities;
- M. whereas in numerous conflicts and crises around the world, attacks on cultural heritage have been an instrument of symbolic violence and the politicisation of cultural heritage; whereas the religious aspects of these conflicts have directly contributed to humanitarian crises, displacement, migration and the violation of religious and cultural rights and human dignity; whereas these conflicts and crises can polarise societies, countries, regions, ethnic groups and communities and increase the risk of violent conflict; whereas therefore the destruction and looting of cultural heritage can be a weapon of war and a warning sign of future mass atrocities; whereas, furthermore, this destruction and looting represent major obstacles to dialogue, peace and reconciliation;
- N. whereas the destruction of cultural heritage renders communities, especially religious communities, vulnerable, as they are deprived of an important part of their identity; whereas extremist groups and other parties to conflict can easily spread their influence

in areas where identities and social cohesion have been weakened and divisions in communities have been reinforced;

- O. whereas in cases of international crimes based on religion or belief, perpetrators have enjoyed impunity, with some minor exceptions, and therefore, atrocities have been able to continue;
- P. whereas, in accordance with the 1948 UN Genocide Convention, states and public authorities have the obligation to not only punish the perpetrators of genocides, but also to prevent such crimes in the first place;
  - 1. Affirms its unwavering commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of persons belonging to belief or religious minorities everywhere in the world, including their right to adopt, change, choose, manifest, exercise or abandon their belief or religion, in respect of the principles of equality and non-discrimination; condemns in the strongest terms all persecution, violence, incitements to violence and acts of terrorism targeting any minority on the grounds of belief or religion, or the lack thereof; stresses that in some cases, violations of these human rights may amount to genocide or crimes against humanity; condemns the denial of or efforts to minimise such violations and reaffirms its commitments to their eradication and its support for victims;
  - 2. Stresses that states have the primary responsibility to promote and safeguard the human rights of persons belonging to belief or religious minorities, including their right to exercise their religion or beliefs and their right not to believe freely, and to protect them against the violations of those rights, in particular, crimes against humanity and genocide;
  - 3. Takes the view that, regardless of belief, religion, thought or conscience, it is essential to promote and ensure the inclusion of all people in their societies and in political, socioeconomic and cultural life, as well as to ensure that their dignity, citizenship, individual rights and freedom are respected;
  - 4. Stresses that freedom of thought, conscience, belief and religion, including the freedom to worship, observe, practise and teach, the freedom to believe or not believe, the freedom to espouse theistic, non-theistic, agnostic or atheistic views, and the right to apostasy are human rights protected under international law; stresses that the promotion and protection of these rights have contributed to the advancement of human rights and democracy in a number of settings, including in repressive environments; recognises that violations of these rights often exacerbate or give rise to intolerance, which often constitute early indicators of potential violence and conflict;
  - 5. Recalls that combating discrimination against all minorities, regardless of their traditions, beliefs or religion, and promoting and protecting their rights, contributes vastly to social and political stability, poverty reduction, democratic governance and conflict prevention;
  - 6. Emphasises that the persecution of minorities on the grounds of belief or religion is often intertwined with other distinct grounds, in particular those linked to national or ethnic origin, gender or caste; highlights the cases in which belief or religious groups suffer persecution, including when they have a strong presence in the territory of a state or are not demographically in the minority, but find themselves in a vulnerable situation

that makes them easy targets of violence and repression; also highlights that converts who leave a majority faith may experience severe violations of their human rights, including imprisonment, forced divorce, abduction, physical violence and murder;

7. Is deeply concerned about the high levels of coercion, discrimination, harassment, violence and repression against people belonging to belief or religious minorities as a global phenomenon that is intensifying in certain regions; notes that it affects many religious communities, such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism among other religions, as well as groups of people who are atheists, humanists, agnostics or who do not identify with any belief or religion;
8. Strongly deplores that non-religious, secular and humanist organisations are facing growing persecution, including unprecedented waves of incitement to hatred and killings, in a number of countries worldwide; denounces that countless individuals and civil society organisations are under assault for peacefully questioning, criticising or satirising religious beliefs; stresses that this ongoing violation of freedom of thought and expression is occurring across geographic and cultural borders, including within EU Member States;
9. Emphasises that the perpetrators of acts of persecution include authoritarian regimes, governments inclined to impose the supremacy of dominant ethnic or religious populations over minorities, terrorist organisations, political and religious extremist parties or groups, and also, sometimes, family members, friends and neighbours of victims, for instance when victims change or abandon their religious allegiance;
10. Welcomes the positive role of some belief and religious communities and faith-based non-governmental organisations in humanitarian activities in conflict zones, in the fight against environmental degradation, in advocating for peace and reconciliation and in contributing to development;
11. Acknowledges that churches, faith-based organisations (FBOs) and other belief and religious institutions and associations play a significant role in the social fabric of developing countries;
12. Underlines that certain FBOs play a strategically important role in influencing and impacting members of their communities to come to a position of understanding and advocacy on crucial issues such as HIV, sexual and reproductive healthcare and the empowerment of girls and women;
13. Notes that churches and other belief and religious institutions, as well as FBOs, are frequently the only providers of healthcare and other social services in remote areas of certain developing countries and in conflict-prone settings;
14. Is of the opinion that humanitarian actors should be trained in the particular sensitivities of religious and belief minority groups in settings where people have been displaced to provide more inclusive aid and protection for a range of refugee populations;

#### ***Tackling key challenges posed by persecution against religious minorities***

15. Stresses the paramount importance of holding accountable perpetrators of human rights abuses against persons belonging to belief or religious minorities; stresses the paramount importance of conducting comprehensive investigations into human rights



abuses, of ensuring that victims and their families have effective access to justice and remedies, and of providing them with adequate reparations; calls on the EU and its Member States to urgently work with relevant UN mechanisms and committees to step up their investigations into ongoing human rights violations against belief or religious minorities around the world; reaffirms, in this regard, its support for the International Criminal Court and underlines the importance of its role in prosecuting the most serious crimes; notes that the Rome Statute covers both crimes against humanity and genocide against groups on the basis of belief or religion and establishes a fundamental international legal framework to fight impunity; calls on the EU and its Member States to increase their financial support to the International Criminal Court and calls on the UN member states to commit to the fight against impunity in this context through the ratification of the Rome Statute; emphasises the need to work towards preventing acts of violence based on belief or religion, in particular international crimes, such as genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes; stresses the need for the EU and its Member States to implement mechanisms that enable them to monitor early warning signs and risk factors for international crimes, as per the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, analyse them and provide comprehensive responses, including in accordance with the duty to prevent and punish the crime of genocide;

16. Notes with concern that most belief and religious-based hate crimes remain under-reported and unprosecuted worldwide; calls on the Council, the Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the EU Member States to work with third countries on the adoption of measures to prevent and fight hate crimes, and on the adoption of legislation that is fully compliant with international standards on the freedom of expression, belief and religion; also calls on governments to establish comprehensive data collection systems on hate crimes and other discriminatory acts against belief or religious communities;
17. Calls on the Council and EU Member States to apply sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for or involved in serious or systematic abuses or violations of freedom of religion or belief, as provided for by the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime;
18. Is appalled by the exacerbation of persecution against belief or religious minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic; denounces the fact that persons belonging to belief or religious minorities have been scapegoated, blamed for spreading the COVID-19 virus, and have faced discrimination in or been denied access to public healthcare, food or humanitarian aid on the basis of belief or religious criteria;
19. Underlines that the delivery of humanitarian assistance must be free from any kind of discrimination and strongly condemns any discrimination based on religious affiliation in the distribution of humanitarian assistance;
20. Calls on the EU and its Member States to recognise the rights, beliefs and values of indigenous peoples, and commit to addressing the specific discrimination that indigenous populations face based on their beliefs in a comprehensive manner through EU external action;
21. Is concerned about the application of blasphemy and religious laws that prevail over national laws in some countries; deplores that women and girls belonging to belief or religious minorities have been specifically and increasingly targeted with the purpose of

inflicting harm on their community as a whole; stresses that they are particularly exposed to violent attacks, kidnappings, rape, sexual and gender-based violence, forced conversion, forced sterilisation and abortions, female genital mutilation, forced and early marriage and domestic incarceration; strongly condemns all of these human rights violations against them and stresses that lockdown measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic have made their human rights situation even more precarious and have further restricted their access to information;

22. Condemns all acts of or incitements to violence, persecution, coercion and discrimination against individuals on the basis of gender or sexual orientation, including by religious leaders or based on religious or belief motivations; stresses that the defence of 'tradition' or 'public morality' cannot contradict, in any instance, international human rights provisions to which states must adhere; highlights, in particular, discrimination in employment, education, access to justice and effective remedies, housing and healthcare; expresses deep concern about the misuse and instrumentalisation of belief or religion to impose discriminatory policies, laws, including criminal laws, or restrictions that contradict and undermine the rights of LGBTIQ people, women and girls and restrict access to basic services, such as education and health, including sexual and reproductive rights, criminalise abortion in all cases, criminalise adultery or facilitate religious practices that violate human rights; calls for the repeal of the relevant policies, laws or restrictions that are often translated into national legislation as secular restrictions;
23. Condemns the religious cults whose activities target diaspora populations from developing countries through schemes to profit financially from the vulnerabilities of these migrant communities in Europe and which promote biased worldviews, often integrating homophobia, transphobia and misogyny;
24. Condemns the human rights violations, sexual abuse, sectarianism and financial misconduct carried out by religious missions and leaders in several developing countries;
25. Condemns the use of legislation on security, sedition, disturbance of public order, incitement to violence and the fight against terrorism and extremism as an instrument to persecute or criminalise persons belonging to belief or religious minorities, outlaw or restrict the practice or expression of their belief or religion, close places of worships and deter the membership in or registration of belief or religious associations; calls on the Commission and the EEAS to monitor the implementation of such legislation carefully, and to consistently raise this issue in bilateral dialogues with the governments concerned; urges EU Member States to reject any request by foreign authorities for judicial and police cooperation in individual judicial cases if they are based on such legislation;
26. Strongly condemns any practice of coercive detention in state-run re-education camps, forced labour or exploitation of persons belonging to belief or religious minorities, where the objectives include compelling them to abandon their religion and assimilate to the dominant culture, language or ways of thinking; also condemns the extensive use of digital surveillance technologies to monitor, control and repress persons belonging to belief or religious minorities;

27. Deplores restrictions on access to legal documentation and registration for organisations and individuals that belong to religious and belief minorities, and recalls that legal identity is a right that must be guaranteed for all people in an equal manner;
28. Deplores the fact that in more than 70 countries in the world, authorities enforce criminal laws or seek to introduce new legislation that provide for punishments for blasphemy, heresy, apostasy, defamation of or insults against religions, and conversion, including the death sentence; notes that laws already in place are used disproportionately against people belonging to belief or religious minorities, and foment a climate of violence, discrimination and religious intolerance, which may include mob violence against minority communities and the destruction of places of worship; calls for the EU to intensify its political dialogue with all countries concerned, with a view to repealing those laws; stresses that the EU's external action in support of the promotion of freedom of religion or belief would benefit from efforts by the EU and the Member States working together to abolish blasphemy laws worldwide; calls for the EU to lead by example by addressing its internal situation, in this regard;
29. Stresses the need to protect the human rights defenders, lawyers, non-governmental organisations and civil society activists who support and defend those who are persecuted on the grounds of belief or religion; denounces the recourse to denunciations of blasphemy, apostasy or other accusations based on religious grounds, in order to crack down on these people and organisations in relation to their legitimate activities, including on the internet and social media;
30. Stresses that states that have compulsory military service should allow for conscientious objection, including on the grounds of religion or belief, and provide for an alternative national service;
31. Considers that the lack of knowledge and recognition of the diversity of religions and beliefs for individuals and communities could fuel bias and stereotypes that contribute to increased tensions, misunderstandings, discriminatory attitudes and disrespect between individuals; recalls that, as stated by the UN Human Rights Committee, public education that includes instruction in a particular religion or belief is inconsistent with the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, unless provisions are made for non-discriminatory exemptions or alternatives that would accommodate the wishes of affected persons and their guardians;
32. Underlines the importance of strategic approaches and educational initiatives that encompass education and intercultural, interfaith and inter-religious dialogues, including those of religious leaders and civil society organisations, in tackling the persecution of and intolerance and hate speech towards minorities on the ground of belief or religion; highlights that intercultural, interfaith and inter-religious dialogues can serve as a catalyst to developing a sense of trust, respect and understanding and to building mutual respect and reconciliation, so as to learn to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural context;
33. Notes that young people in developing countries are particularly vulnerable to extremist ideologies, and quality education is one of the key steps to combat radicalisation; notes that extremist movements often exploit the weak presence of the state in rural areas;

34. Deplores that social media platforms and networks are being increasingly exploited as spaces for intimidation and incitement to hatred and violence; highlights that belief or religious minorities continue to be subject to online and offline hate speech from individuals and organised groups across the political and religious spectrum and calls on governments to address and counter this;

***Strengthening EU human rights foreign policy and external actions to protect the freedom of belief and religion of persons belonging to minority groups***

35. Takes note that the post of the EU Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU has remained vacant for more than a year; reiterates its call for the Council and the Commission to carry out a transparent and comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness and added value of the position of the Special Envoy, to provide the Special Envoy with adequate resources, and to adequately support the Special Envoy's institutional mandate, capacity and duties; reiterates its calls for the Commission to guarantee transparency in the nomination, mandate, activities and reporting obligations of the Special Envoy; stresses that the Special Envoy's duties should focus on promoting freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, and the rights to non-belief, apostasy and the espousal of atheistic views, while also paying attention to the situation of non-believers at risk; recommends that the Special Envoy work closely and in a complementary manner with the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and the Council Working Group on Human Rights (COHOM);
36. Calls on the Council, the Commission, EEAS and EU Member States to address persecutions based on belief or religion as one of the priorities of EU human rights foreign policy, in line with the EU action plan for human rights and democracy for 2020-2024; stresses that a multi-layered and multi-actor approach is needed to protect and promote freedom of belief or religion, encompassing human rights, dialogue, mediation and conflict resolution and prevention in cooperation with multiple state and non-state actors, such as FBOs, religious leaders, non-believer's groups, civil society organisations and human rights defenders; calls for enhanced cooperation with UN initiatives on this matter; reiterates its call for a regular and public review of the EU Guidelines on freedom of religion or belief, allowing for the assessment of their implementation and of proposals for their update; notes that the EU Guidelines provide for an evaluation of their implementation by COHOM after a period of three years, and that no such evaluation has been shared or made public; considers that such an evaluation should highlight best practices, identify areas for improvement and provide concrete recommendations on the implementation of the Guidelines, in accordance with a specified timeline and milestones; calls for the evaluation to be included in the EU Annual Reports on Human Rights and Democracy in the World; also calls for progress reports on the implementation of the Guidelines to be communicated regularly to Parliament;
37. Calls on the EU and its Member States to strengthen legal and institutional protection mechanisms to secure the human rights of members of belief and religious minorities and of any person in a vulnerable situation, including women and girls, persons of different ethnicities or castes, elderly and disabled people, migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, and LGBTIQ persons, so that they are fully protected on the basis of their fundamental rights and are not subjected to discrimination because of their belief or religion;

38. Underlines that the instrumentalisation of religion and belief constitutes an important driver of conflict worldwide; stresses that persecution and discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief forces many individuals and communities to migrate or become internally displaced persons; calls on the Commission and the EU Member States to assist all displaced persons, including those belonging to belief or religious minorities, who wish to voluntarily return to their homelands when material and security conditions allow for it and the circumstances that led to their departure no longer exist, in particular by contributing to their livelihoods and the reconstruction of their housing and basic infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals;
39. Calls for the EU and its partners to consider mapping the role of religion in specific conflicts, identifying and engaging with existing positive actions by religious leaders in peace-building endeavours and conflict analysis and prevention, and listening to and assessing multiple voices representative of both majority and minority religious groups;
40. Points out that violence against religious minorities during conflict can also make them vulnerable to further attacks in refugee settings due to misinterpretations of the humanitarian principles of neutrality and universality and widespread assumptions held about religion as either non-essential or divisive;
41. Urges the EEAS and EU delegations to include objectives specifically related to the persecution of minorities on the grounds of belief or religion for all relevant situations, as part of the human rights and democracy country strategies for 2021-2024; calls on the EEAS and EU delegations to consistently raise general issues and specific cases relating to the persecution of or discrimination against belief or religious minorities during human rights dialogues with partner countries and at UN human rights fora, while following a result-oriented approach and including a gender perspective; reiterates its call for Members of Parliament to be given access to the content of these country strategies; observes that atheism and non-religious groups are growing rapidly and should be treated equally under the EU policy framework;
42. Points out that in some countries, the main sources of discrimination against minorities come from non-state actors; calls on the Commission and Member States not to focus exclusively on government-based discrimination and to work with partner countries in tackling the causes of societal discrimination against minorities, with special regard to hate speech;
43. Calls on the EU delegations and the representations of the Member States to support human rights defenders and journalists active in relation to belief or religious minorities, and, where appropriate, to facilitate the issuance of emergency visas and provide temporary shelter in EU Member States when these individuals are at risk;
44. Calls on the Commission to support civil society organisations and social campaigns that promote understanding and awareness of non-majority belief and religious groups, especially humanists and atheists in countries where they face particularly serious forms of discrimination;
45. Calls on the Commission and EEAS to closely scrutinise the human rights situations of belief or religious minorities in third countries and the implementation of those countries' related commitments under bilateral agreements with the EU; calls on the Commission to review, in particular, the eligibility of third countries under the

generalised scheme of preferences in this regard; advocates a system that gradually grants preferences to a third country based on its compliance with its human rights commitments, including with respect to freedom of religion or belief;

46. Stresses that the EU should take into account the concrete challenges that religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities often face when accessing humanitarian assistance due to marginalisation, active targeting or weak socioeconomic positioning; calls on the Commission to assess minorities' effective access to humanitarian assistance and ensure that its humanitarian policy does not overlook minorities;
47. Deplores destruction of and damage to religious sites, which constitute an integral part of cultural heritage, and calls for their protection and restoration; recommends that the EU include the protection of cultural heritage as an element of its foreign policy external actions with the aims of preserving peace, promoting reconciliation and preventing conflict; recommends that the EU use cooperation on cultural heritage as part of confidence building measures in peace processes;
48. Calls on the Commission to ensure adequate funding for issues related to the protection of persons belonging to belief or religious minorities, under the human rights thematic programme of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe; calls for the EU to ensure respect for the principles of pluralism, neutrality and fairness and to refrain strictly from strengthening policies or legislation that favour one belief or religious group over others when allocating funds for this purpose;
49. Recommends strengthening EU multilateral engagement with a view to promoting and mainstreaming the respect for belief or religious minorities in human rights policies worldwide; calls for the EU and its Member States to enhance cooperation with the UN, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to intensify open and constructive dialogues with the African Union, the Organization of American States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and other regional organisations, and forge alliances with third countries or groups of like-minded states in order to provide international responses to human rights issues faced by belief or religious minorities, in particular those who are most vulnerable or targeted in conflict areas; recommends that the EU continue to be the lead sponsor of resolutions on freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief at the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council; calls for EU-UN joint initiatives to tackle persecution and discrimination against belief or religious minorities and non-believers; calls for the EU to step up cooperation with the UN Human Rights Council, notably through the UN Human Rights Council's special procedures, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; also recommends that special envoys for freedom of religion or belief throughout the EU Member States share their best practices and work closely together;
50. Underlines the importance of 22 August as the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief; calls on the Council, the Commission and the EU Member States to pay special attention to this day in their planning and actively engage with belief or religious minorities in order to show commitment to promoting and protecting their freedoms and work towards preventing future acts of violence and intolerance against them;

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51. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the United Nations.