PARLEMENT EUROPEEN

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Brussels, 1 December 2010

Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi
Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Constitution Avenue,
Islamabad

RE: Possible EU assistance on death penalty

Dear Minister,

I am writing following our meeting on the 14th of October in Brussels, at the European Parliament, where we briefly discussed the death penalty in Pakistan.

I thought it might be worth us speaking soon, to discuss ways in which the EU might be able to assist the PPP to reduce the number of people currently on death row, as reports indicate that there are approximately 7,500 people currently under sentence of death. Official figures from June this year showed that there were 6,176 "condemned prisoners" detained in the Punjab, making that state's death row population larger than that of any country in the world.

One of the problems that I have been made aware of is that many prisoners facing execution are not able to afford a private lawyer for their appeals. Whilst they are provided with a state lawyer for their trial and appeals (I believe the lawyers are paid less than Rs. 2000) many of the prisoners find the level of representation they provide to be inadequate compared to that provided by private lawyers who can charge more than 100 times more than the state lawyers are paid. I have been informed by Clive Stafford Smith, Director of the charity of Reprieve, who assists British nationals facing the death penalty in Pakistan and around the world, that the quality of representation in the cases that they have come across is often grossly inadequate. This is a view that was also given by former human rights minister Ansar Burney, who in February 2008 stated that he believed that 60% of those facing the death penalty are innocent.

The reason for me raising this is that I am aware of the PPP's opposition to the death penalty and the efforts that have been made recently to try and commute the death sentences of all those currently facing execution. Prime Minister Gillani's proposal to the National Assembly that all death sentences in Pakistan be commuted to life imprisonment was a brave step, and it is unfortunate that the President has been unable to sign this into law. However, these steps show your party's clear commitment to abolition.

I was therefore writing to enquire as to whether there was anything that we at the European Parliament can do to help – either in terms of assisting your government enact the mass commutation that has been proposed, or trying to help ensure that all those individual currently facing the death penalty are able to secure representation in which they feel confident. There are several ways in which we could do this – for instance, if it would help, we could secure an official demarche from the European Union asking that you commute all the current death sentences in Pakistan, which may help provide you with the political cover that the President needs to sign the commutation. Alternatively, there may be other ways in which we could help. It would be therefore be very helpful if we could speak soon about what the EU can do to assist you and your party to reduce the number of prisoners on death row.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Warm regards,

Ana Gomes MEP