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Bindig, Rudolf
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Raab, Daniela

Alliance 90/The Greens members



Nickels, Christa
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Hoppe, Thilo

CDU/CSU members



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(Deputy Chair)

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German Bundestag

Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid

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Ausschuss für Menschenrechte und Humanitäre Hilfe

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Treading an uncomfortable path

In the current electoral term, a permanent committee dealing with human rights and humanitarian aid has once again been set up. The importance which the Bundestag places on human rights policy was underlined in 2003 when, in the context of a debate on the key areas of German policy-making, the Bundestag adopted a motion defining respect of human rights as one of the guiding principles of German policy. Amongst other things, this motion highlighted the fact that the committee members' commitment to human rights applies to Treading an uncomfortable path both domestic and foreign policy issues. This was not always the case; until 1998, the human rights committee was a sub-committee of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and dealt mainly with foreign policy matters.

Tasks

The Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid deals with a wide spectrum of issues. Subjects of key interest for the parliamentarians in the current electoral term include the safeguarding of human rights in the war on terrorism, the protection of defenders of human rights and the area of Islamic law and human rights.

The committee also concerns itself with the further development of national, European and international instruments to safeguard human rights, and with the legal and political scrutiny of human rights infringements. Human rights issues also often arise in foreign, development and security policy, in economic and external trade policy, and in asylum and refugee policy. Questions concerning policy on minorities and humanitarian aid are also amongst the issues routinely dealt with by the committee.

Working methods

The committee keeps itself constantly informed on the human rights situation around the world. It achieves this by consulting the responsible ministries and experts from within Germany and abroad and by frequently exchanging opinions with diplomatic representatives and human rights organisations. This provides

the Members with important background information. They are thus able to use their wide-ranging contacts to political institutions in Germany and abroad, to governments and to human rights groups and bring their influence to bear in a targeted manner. Contact with national and international NGOs is particularly vital. The German Institute for Human Rights set up in 2001, the Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid and the Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Matters at the Federal Ministry of Justice are reliable partners in the process of mainstreaming the issue of human rights into all policy areas.



Dalai Lama, Christa Nickels

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From the outset, the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid has met with a positive response from politicians at home and abroad, as well as from a wide range of national and international human rights groups. The agenda is often shaped by current events. Reports by the Federal Government on the situation in Afghanistan, Chechnya, China, Colombia, Turkey, Africa or the Middle East, for example, are placed on the agenda at short notice. The members of the committee also inform themselves about the type and scope of humanitarian aid which may be necessary in countries suffering from the effects of natural disasters or military conflict. Delegations of Committee members also travel to crisis regions, such as Afghanistan and Sudan, in order to gain a first-hand view of the humanitarian and human rights situation there. Whilst there, they seek options for action and appropriate measures of assistance, which are then fed into recommendations to the Federal Government and into parliamentary motions.

The Committee also initiated the "Parliamentarians Protect Parliamentarians" programme, which was agreed on unanimously, by all parliamentary groups, in the Bundestag and which involves German parliamentarians providing support for foreign colleagues who are under threat, whose exercise of office, or even life, is at risk because of their commitment to human rights. The work of the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid overlaps with numerous other areas of policy. This is also reflected in its parliamentary work. Increasingly, when the committee is asked for an opinion on items of business where other committees have overall responsibility, it does not merely state its support or rejection, but also makes concrete recommendations from a human rights viewpoint. One of the characteristics of committee work is the way in which all the parliamentary groups represented on the committee work together constructively. As a result of its persistent and sustained domestic and foreign policy work, the committee has established itself as an important and sometimes uncomfortable parliamentary voice.

Christa Nickels

"It is important that we preserve the key objective of this committee: to take the side of human rights. In fulfilling this commitment we continue to tread an uncomfortable path, because credible human rights policy also begins at home. We must ensure, for example, that meticulous attention is paid to human rights in Germany and Europe in the fight against terrorism. "



Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer and Christa Nickels

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Hearing on the protection of human rights defenders

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