

# Liberty

*Bi-Monthly English Organ of the  
Eritrean People's Democratic Party - EPDP*

## **ERITREANS FACE ABUSES AT HOME AND TRAGEDIES IN EXILE**



**FRIGHTENED BY SITUATION IN THE REGION, EUROPE INCLINED  
TO STAND WITH CRUEL DICTATORSHIP IN ERITREA**



March-April 2015

Issue # 32

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- EU Tries to Justify Its Support to Repression in Eritrea .....pages 3-5
- EPDP Chairman Asks EU to Save Lives, Not a Dictatorship .....5-6
- UN Finds `Clear Patterns` of Human Rights Violations in Eritrea .....5-7
- UN CEDAW Committee: Eritrea Violates Women’s Rights .....8-9
- Sinai Torture Documentary Watched, Debated in Geneva .....9-10
- Father Mussie Alerts About Danger to Refugees in Libya .....10
- Interview with Young Survivor of Libya Beheadings .....11
- Mysteries of the Eritrean Bisha Mine.....12
- Kassala Center for Disabled Obtains Donation.....13
- Wad-Sherifey Refugee School Ends 31st School Year.....13
- VOA Interviewee’s Unjustifiable Justifications.....14

## **ERITREANS CONTINUE ENCOUNTERING HARD LIFE AND TRAGEDIES AT HOME AND ABROAD**

The last few months of 2015 were exceptionally bad for asylum seekers in general and Eritreans in particular. Because nothing has changed to the better in Eritrea, the exodus of people, including minors fleeing hopelessness at home, intensified as never before. Those outside home also continued to face increasing tragedies like mass drowning and beheadings in the hands of extremists.

- Of the estimated 1,700 deaths so far recorded this year in the Mediterranean Sea, it was feared that a big chunk of them were Eritreans. In fact, UNHCR reported that out of those estimated 800 persons who perished in a single boat in the Mediterranean Sea 10-11 April, Eritreans were estimated to be over 350!!
- Also of the still unknown number of persons beheaded in Libya by ISIS in April, up to 50 are feared to be Eritreans and about 8 Ethiopians. Ethiopia declared a national mourning. Eritrea kept silent as was the case when over 360 Eritreans perished near Lampedusa on 3 October 2013.
- Of the 200,000 Africans stranded in Yemen, about 50,000 were reported to be Eritreans. Ethiopia and other countries started taking steps to help their citizens in distress. As usual, the regime in Eritrea kept silent.

The UN Inquiry Commission believed that Eritreans have “no hope for their future” under current situation. But the powers that matter are starting to turn their back on the Eritrean people .They are about to tell them: “**you only deserve the dictatorship you already have**”. Thus, adding insult to injury, the European Union and other quarters lately appeared to be willing to appease the dictatorship in Eritrea which was for a long time singled out to be the worst of the worst in suppressing its own people. Details on these issues are narrated in the following pages.

## **EU'S MOGHERINI TRIES TO JUSTIFY SUPPORT TO THE INCORRIGIBLE DICTATORSHIP IN ASMARA**

In a response letter dated 16 April 2015, the office of Ms. Federica Mogherini, the EU Commission Vice-President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, stated that the EU shares the deep concerns “about the difficult human rights situation in Eritrea” although she could not hide that the EU is inclined to give help to the Asmara regime. “EU’s overall objective remains to help the people in Eritrea to have a peaceful, sustainable and rewarding life”, the letter added.

Written in response to the EPDP memorandum of 31 March 2015 protesting about the intended EU support to the incorrigible regime in Eritrea, the EU letter believed that political engagement with Eritrea “remains valuable for two reasons”:

- To “press for improvement in human rights and reform across the board”, and
- “To support the Eritrean people through EU development projects”.



The lengthy stated in an attempt to allay Eritrean fears that “strict monitoring procedures make sure that EU aid is for the benefit of people, creating jobs and reducing poverty”. It went on: “currently, EU support is focusing on food security enhancement through the improvement of agricultural production and yields, and on strengthening the rule of law in Eritrea by supporting community courts at grassroots’ level”.

It was also stated that the support will benefit non-state actors inside Eritrea but did not specify which civil society organizations. Regarding refugees, it said that EU is fully behind the Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative (HoAMRI), also called the Khartoum Process, established in November 2014 to fight human trafficking and people smuggling in the region.

It is to be recalled that the EPDP memorandum of 31 March expressed utter dismay with the regional body’s plans to help the dying though still repressive regime in Asmara, and urged Europe to stand with the victimized Eritrean people.

It is to be recalled that the EPDP memorandum of 31 March expressed utter dismay with the regional body’s plans to help the dying though still repressive regime in Asmara, and urged Europe to stand with the victimized Eritrean people.

Addressed to Ms Federica Mogherini with copies to Mr. Donald Tusk, President of the Council of EU; Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the EU Commission; Mr. Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, and to foreign ministries of all the 28 EU Member States, the memorandum regretted EU's plan of repeating another mistake of vainly trying to engage an incorrigible regime that failed it in the past.



**Messrs Donald Tusk, Martin Schultz and Jean Claude Junker**

The EPDP message also listed priority areas in which the European Union can be of help to the distressed 6 million Eritreans at this critical hour in their life. Copied below is the full text of the memorandum.

Your Excellency EU High Representative Mogherini,

We in the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP), an organization in exile struggling for democratic change, are addressing this message to your esteemed office, with copies to all concerned in the European Union, to express our utter dismay about the reported intention of the EU to once more resort to gestures of appeasement with the incorrigible and Africa's most repressive regime in Asmara.

When the UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea submitted its interim report to the UN Human Rights Council on 16 March 2015 affirming that "most Eritreans have no hope for their future" under the current regime, the EU representative, Mr. Peter Sorensen, welcomed the report as "an excellent work" and stated that the EU was "deeply concerned about the persisting human rights violations" in Eritrea. The EU message to the Council also regretted that the Eritrean regime is refusing all cooperation and access to the country where "arbitrary arrests, disappearances, torture, extra-judiciary killings..." are taking place and restriction of freedoms is widely reported.

EU member states that addressed the UN Human Rights Council on 16 March, among them Germany, France and UK, also strongly supported and endorsed the EU statement.

Dear Ms Mogherini,

The EU's generous grant of €122 million in 2007 did nothing to change the regime from continuing violating human and political rights of its own. Both the EU and the Eritrean regime appeared to have agreed to ignore the Cotonou Agreement stipulating that any support from the EU was strictly conditional to good governance and respect of human rights. To the contrary, the regime in As-

Asmara continued to defy and violate the Cotonou Agreement and the EU funds had proven to have helped to strengthen the criminal security apparatus of the regime. As a result, more displacement and flight of desperate refugees increased since that time.

Dear Madam,

The Eritrean people deserve sympathy and support and not the repressive regime that victimized them for decades. We therefore appeal to your esteemed office to listen to our people's appeals to the EU to stop re-empowering a regime whose days now appear numbered.

Instead of supporting the repressive regime, we request the EU and its member states to do the following:

1. ***To tell the regime in Asmara that it does not deserve EU support until it stops all the cruelties it is meting out against its own people.***
2. ***The EU to initiate an extensive package programme for Eritrean refugees in the Horn of Africa. This programme can provide academic education, skill training and scholarships and prepare young and disadvantaged Eritreans for a better future in post-dictatorship Eritrea. It can be financed mainly by the technical assistance funds suspended for over a decade by many countries because of the Asmara regime's bad human rights record.***

***We also ask the EU to forget the Asmara regime and engage Eritrean non-state political and civil society actors. These pro-democracy actors deserve your support for empowerment now.***

To sum, a resumption of support to the regime in Asmara will again prove to be a wrong action by the EU. It will prove to be repeating a failed experience? We therefore urge the EU and its member states not to spend time and resources on such futile endeavor that will not yield the intended results. Eritreans will continue fleeing the country as long as the regime of Isayas Afewerki is in power.

EPDP Foreign Relations Office

## **EPDP Chairman Asks EU to Save Refugee Lives and Stop Rewarding Dictatorship**

In a memorandum addressed to Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP) urged the regional body to save refugee lives from drowning in the immediate shores of Europe.

The EPDP Chairman, Mr. Mengheteab Asmerom, asked the EU Commission President to "join us in mourning yet another tragedy, another Lampedusa that occurred this week in the Mediterranean Sea – your sea".



Copied also to Ms Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; Mr. Donald Tusk, President of the Council of EU; Mr. Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, as well as to Permanent Missions of 28 EU Member States, the EPDP memo of 17 April 2015 also urged the European organization no to go ahead with its intention of rewarding the dictatorship in Eritrea because doing so will not solve the problem. Printed below is the memorandum.

\*\*\*

Your Excellency Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker,

I, the undersigned chairman of the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP), an organization in exile struggling for democratic change in Eritrea, am addressing this message to Your Excellency, with copies to your close work colleagues, to ask you to join us in mourning yet another tragedy, another Lampedusa, that occurred this week in the Mediterranean Sea – your sea - claiming over 400 lives. And as usual, many of them were from my distressed country, Eritrea.

Mr. Juncker,

Eritrea has become a human disaster and a situation similar to what is going on in Syria and other war-torn regions of the world. As you very well know, the cause of human suffering in Eritrea is not an ongoing war but the total absence of the rule of law and respect to human rights.

This week and in recent years, the vast majority of victims in the Mediterranean Sea were not “migrants” but genuine asylum seekers fleeing humanly intolerable situations in Eritrea, Somalia, Syria and a few other places. And needless to say, they are people who deserve protection until the situation that forced them to escape from home is changed to the better. Unfortunately, Sir, the EU is not responding appropriately to the plight of refugees. Instead, it joins others to describe asylum seekers from Eritrea, Syrian, Somalia and similar hard hit regions as “migrants” and wrongly believes that the death of many more of them will stop others from taking the risk.

This memorandum aims to once again call upon your esteemed office to review the EU policy of not actively engaging in saving lives in the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, we request the EU To kindly come with a meaningful operation like the now defunct Mare Nostrum to save lives.

We also believe that EU must launch a major support programme for Eritrean refugees with package programme in the Horn of Africa. As explained many times to the EU, this programme can provide academic education, skill training and scholarships and prepare young and disadvantaged Eritreans for a better future in post-dictatorship Eritrea. It can be financed mainly by the technical assistance funds suspended for over a decade by many countries because of the Asmara regime's bad human rights record.

Your Excellency,

Allow me also to take this opportunity to reiterate our utter disappointment about the intended EU support to the incorrigible regime in Asmara that failed the EU and all well intentioned donors in the past several years. The money EU is intending to give to the regime will not stop the suffering of Eritreans, and their flight will continue until a positive change is realized in the country. We, therefore, ask the EU to reconsider and drop its intention of rewarding the dictatorship in Eritrea for its appalling human rights record as attested by experts of the UN Human Rights Council.

*EPDP Chairman*

## UN Inquiry Commission Finds ‘Very Clear Patterns’ of Human Rights Abuses in Eritrea

UN News Centre: A four-month United Nations investigation into the human rights situation in Eritrea has found “very clear patterns” of violations and abuses, according to a report delivered on 16 March 2015 at the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva.



“Most Eritreans have no hope for their future,” said Mike Smith, Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea, which despite not being granted permission to visit Eritrea, collected testimony from more than 500 members of the Eritrean diaspora.

Presenting the Commission’s interim report, Council, Mr. Smith said that in Eritrea national service is universal and of an indefinite duration. From the age of 17, Eritreans could expect to spend their lives in national service, struggling to live on less than two dollars a day.

Meanwhile, the Government has curtailed basic freedoms to the extent that, “individuals feel that they have hardly any choice with regard to the main decisions in their lives: where to live, what career to pursue, when to marry or who to worship,” he noted in a news release on the report.



For Eritreans, Mr. Smith said, “detention is an ordinary fact of life, experienced by an inordinate number of individuals – men and women, old and young, including children.” Detention centres range from official to the unofficial, located above ground or underground. Some have metal containers where prisoners are kept in extreme heat.

“Once in one of them, there is a likelihood that you will be subject to torture to extract a confession or to simply punish behaviours,” he added.

Torture is widespread, both in detention and during national service. Some Eritreans interviewed by the Commission had been beaten or tortured simply for asking for medicine, or for drinking water without permission. Mr. Smith pointed out that these violations take place against a backdrop of the so-called “no war, no peace” situation related to Eritrea’s unresolved border issues with neighbouring countries.

“This has become the pretext for almost all the State’s actions that generate and perpetuate human rights violations in the country,” he said. “It is an expression abusively used by the Eritrean authorities to disregard international human rights law.” Under this pretext, the entire society has been militarised, the Constitution has never been implemented and there is no rule of law, according to the news release, which added that no one was being held accountable for human rights violations.

The three Commission members, who beside Mr. Mike Smith, included Ms Sheilla Keetharuth, UN Human Rights Rapporteur for Eritrea, the Ghanaian lawyer Victor Dankwa, were explaining to the plenary session of the UN Human Rights Commission the unhappy reports they were receiving and hearing from victims.

## UN BODY SERIOUSLY CONCERNED ABOUT VIOLATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN ERITREA

In a statement released on 6 March 2015, a specialized committee of the UN Human Rights Council criticized the Eritrean regime for not respecting women's rights that are well enshrined in a convention that the Asmara regime itself has already signed.

The committee scrutinizing failures in the implementation the Convention to Eliminate all forms Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) discussed women's situation in Eritrea. Also discussed was a report from the Eritrean delegation at the meeting that was presented on 26 February 2015.



Dr Daniel Rezene represents Eritrean Law Society at Geneva meeting on women's rights

Concluding observations of the Committee on Discrimination against Women contain serious concerns about the absence of rule of law in Eritrea with an elected National Assembly and fully implemented constitution which the basic necessities for protection and promotion of human rights, like women's rights stated in the Convention (CEDAW).

The committee could not expect any improvement in the Eritrean women's situation before steps are taken to the rule of law in the country.

Prevalence of sexual abuse of women in the Eritrean army, absence of criminal action against sex offenders, the open-ended "national service" that force women and families to escape from the regime, and the presence of small arms at every corner in the country were mentioned among the concerns of the committee that believed they should be addressed "as a matter of high priority".

(See: [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=901&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=901&Lang=en) - scroll down to see Eritrea)

Dr. Daniel Rezene, an Eritrean democracy and human rights activist residing in Switzerland, actively participated in the discussions and made written and oral presentations representing the Eritrean Law Society (ELS). Below are excerpts from the CEDAW committee meetings concluding observations.

### **From CEDAW Observations:**

6: The Committee considers that the indefinite national service, the ineffective implementation of the 1997 Constitution and the suspension of the National Assembly, have resulted in a deterioration of the rule of law and resulted in a serious refugee crisis which pose a challenge to the implementation of the Convention. Therefore the Committee urges the State party to implement the recommendations contained in the present concluding observations as a matter of high priority.

8(e): Concerned about [t]he proliferation of small arms and the accessibility of firearms to individuals in the framework of the national service and their impact on the security of women.



9(b): Prevent, investigate, prosecute in criminal courts, and punish all cases of violence against women and girls in the national service and at the Sawa Military Training Centre, implement a policy of zero tolerance and provide legal aid, rehabilitation programmes and compensation to victims;

11(a): Ensure the effective implementation of the 1997 Constitution of Eritrea and expedite the planned Constitutional review process, within a clear timeframe and with transparent procedures ...

13(b): Ensure that all cases of violence and discrimination against women covered by the Convention are brought under the jurisdiction of criminal instead of military courts, including when violations of the law are committed by military or public officials;

20(c): Alleged perpetrators of sexual violence against women in the national service are rarely prosecuted.

22. ...it is concerned about reports that numerous women and girls, including unaccompanied children who are fleeing the country become victims of human trafficking and smuggling.

24. ...it is concerned that women remain underrepresented in senior government positions and at reports that the measures taken only benefit women sharing the views of the political party in power.

25(b): Expeditiously hold free and fair elections to the National Assembly and other elected bodies, ensuring that all women, including those from disadvantaged groups and those holding divergent opinions, can vote and stand for election;

49: It also invites the State party to consider ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court [other international treaties].

### **‘SOUND OF TORTURE’ DOCUMENTARY ON SINAI AGAIN WATCHED, DEBATED IN GENEVA**

“Eritrea is one of the tragedies of our times. What is there is an unacceptable situation”. These were the opening words of Professor Vincent Chetail of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, which together with Human Rights Watch, organized a debate on 16 March over the film ‘Sound of Torture’ on the suffering of Eritreans in the Sinai.

The documentary film by journalist Meron Estefanos captured the full attention of the audience and ended with perceptible sounds of shock and sobs from many kind hearted watchers. (This is a small clip from the Sound of Torture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwXSsCWeSyk>).

At the end of the film show, Prof. Chetail, the moderator, introduced the panelists: Ms Meron Estefanos herself, Mr. Gerry Simpson of the Human Rights Watch and Ms Janice Maishall of UNHCR.



At the end of the film show, Prof. Chetail, the moderator, introduced the panellists: Ms Meron Estefanos herself, Mr. Gerry Simpson of the Human Rights Watch and Ms Janice Maishall of UNHCR.

Ms Meron Estefanos narrated the Sinai tragedy in an eloquent presentation which gave more life to the film show by graphically describing the suffering of so many human beings because of the failure of their own government in Asmara. She revealed that up to 25,000 Eritreans were affected by the human trafficking networks in the Sinai and that 4,000 of them died in the hands of their abusers. She also told in great detail the suffering of those 35,000 Eritreans in Israel who are insulted and demonized as “infiltrators”.



Mr. Simpson of the Human Rights Watch added that the suffering of Eritreans in the hands of human traffickers was aggravated by the complicity of Sudanese and Egyptian security members. It was also revealed that no protection is being given to Eritrean refugees by Ethiopia and the Sudan both of which keep refugees away in the remote zone without adequate shelter and other needs.

The UNHCR was blamed of not doing enough for Eritrean refugees. The UNHCR representative admitted that Eritreans escaping from their country are genuine refugees and deserve protection everywhere, and that the European Union is expected to come with adequate safety measures for these victims of forced displacement.

### **FR. MUSSIE'S WARNING BEFORE THE RECENT TRAGEDIES UNFOLDED IN LIBYA**

The Eritrean priest, Father Mussie Zerai, who remains in a 24-hour contact with distressed Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees in North Africa, said on 8 March that he was extremely worried about the fate of up to 3,000 Eritreans stranded in war-torn Libya.

He informed a Harnet.org stringer in Switzerland that about 2,500 Eritreans and a few Ethiopians were in the Libyan city of Tripoli, 350 in Misrata,



some 60 in Ajdabiya and 10 in Benghazi. He said traffickers bring people free of charge from the Sudan and then ask for money upon arrival in Libya.



Since then, hundreds of them had drowned in the Mediterranean Sea and a still unknown number were beheaded by extremist militias in Libya.

## **SURVIVOR OF RECENT BEHEADING IN LIBYA TELLS SHOCKING DETAIL OF THE INCIDENT**

A young Eritrean survivor of the recent killings of Habesha “Christians” in Libya told the Paris-based Eritrean opposition Radio Erena that the victims were over 50, most of them Eritreans and a few Ethiopians.

Sixteen-year old Mael Goitom told Radio Erena’s Meron Estefanos in an interview broadcast live to Eritrea on 23 April that the beheadings and shooting took place on 7 March although the video of the brutal act was released a month later. According to the young witness, those shot on the head were 44 while other 14 were beheaded on the sea cost.



The interviewee tells that their group consisted of 80 persons when they were stopped by the Islamist militia of IS near the city of Sirte only three days before the beheading took place. There were 8 Ethiopians in the group while the rest were Eritreans. The IS killers separated the ten women in the group and took them away. Their whereabouts is not yet known.

Of the rest, 10 minors, including the interviewee, were taken out of the group before the killings started. Mael Goitom said he and the other minors cried loudly when the killings started in front of their eyes. They were later shut inside a vehicle for the rest of the killing process. Among the killers were three Tigrigna-speaking Eritreans.

The ten minors were later joined by three Eritreans who were spared death because they could recite a few Qoranic verses. The thirteen survivors were immediately “converted” to Islam and started receiving religious education. However, other armed militias opened fire on the IS group and young Eritreans could somehow escape and finally find a compatriot who could help them.



Talking on the phone from southern Italy, Mael Goitom told Journalist Meron Estefanos that he and other four minors (Yohannes Mebrahtu, Yonas Gebre, Abraham Naizghi and Aman Shishay) are still in “a state of extreme shock”.

During the interview, young Mael said they are now joined with a sixth roommate, Yasin Abdel Aziz, who was in the hands of IS in Libya only three months ago.

## THE MYSTERIES OF THE ERITREAN BISHA MINE

The Eritrean Bisha mine, which started producing gold, silver and other minerals in 2011, embodies a number of mysteries. No accounting figures are publicly released by the Eritrean government as to what the mining complex generates as revenue to the nation (read to the pockets of the dictator and clique). The allegations that the Bisha mine used slave-labour for many years have not yet reached a conclusive verdict. And no one knows the full truth about the damage inflicted on the mine on 20 March 2015. Was it an attack by Ethiopian airforce, as claimed by a Sudanese newspaper? Was it a rocket shot from northern Ethiopia? Or was it a “vandalism” from within Eritrea by forces opposed to the repressive regime?



The Bisha gold mine, run by the Canadian Nevsun corporation is said to be producing from 300 to 400 million dollars a year. If that is the produce, no one still knows how much royalties and shares goes to the Eritrean government.

On its part, the EPDP website received report from inside the homeland that the mining complex at Bisha and other targets in Eritrea were indeed hit by Ethiopian missiles. The EPDP sources said the targets were more than two. Besides Bisha, the other targets included a military depot near Dekemhare, and an unidentified target near Barentu. The missile did not cause damage in Barentu but the Bisha mine sustained a slight damage while the military depot at Mai-Edaga near the town of Dekemhare was heavily damaged.

The dictatorial regime in Asmara preferred to maintain a blackout on this serious incident for little known reasons. The EPDP therefore concluded that if true, this repeat of Ethiopian military action will constitute an unwarranted act of aggression, as was the case in the spring of 2011, on the territorial sovereignty of the state of Eritrea which is already severely hurt by erroneous policies and acts of the regime.

## Eritrean Group in Stockholm Supports Center for Disabled Veterans in Sudan

A well-intentioned grouping of Eritreans in Stockholm on 28 February 2015 made a donation of 5,000 Swedish krona (US \$600) in support of the Center for Disabled Eritreans in Kassala, Sudan.



The sum was received by Ms Alganesh Isaac, chairperson of the Sweden branch of the Association for Disabled Eritreans (ADE), an international body legally established in France and presided by the veteran freedom fighter Tesfai Teklezghi. The good gestures of the civil society grouping in Stockholm, known as the Eritrean Platform for Dialogue, are also being extended to help newly arriving young Eritreans in Sweden.

## Eritrean Refugee School at Wad-Sherifey in Sudan Successfully Ends 31<sup>st</sup> Academic Year

On 15 March 2015, the Wad-Sherifey Refugee School near Kassala, East Sudan, held another colourful school ceremony winding up its academic year for 2014-2015. The school-year started last June with 666 enrolled, of whom 577 students (262 of them female) continued their education till the final exams in which 89.25% were promoted to higher grades. The Wad-Sherifey



Eritrean Refugee School was started by the Eritrean Red Cross-Crescent Society (ERCCS) in 1984, and for the last 31 years it has been enrolling between 600 and 800 children annually,

mainly in grades 1 to 6 taught in Arabic and Tigrinia.

## **VOA Interviewee's Lamé Justifications in Support of the Repressive Regime in Eritrea**

In a recent Voice of America's Press Conference USA program, Ms Bronwyn Bruton, former news correspondent and current deputy director of the Africa Centre of the Atlantic Council, alleged, inter alia, that the flight of so many Eritreans from the country "is exaggerated" because those tens of thousands claiming to be from Eritrea simply to obtain asylum "are not actually Eritreans".

This is unjustified and unfair comment because distressed Eritreans have been escaping from the regime in big numbers. Those who may try to use the name "Eritrean" can only be an insignificant number, if any. That shameful statement does not even deserved a response. The comment is indeed a travesty of justice and extremely unfair to the victims of the brutal regime in Asmara that of course did its best to impress the official from the Atlantic Council.

Ms Bruton agreed with the dictator she interviewed that it was only "circumstances" that forced the regime to impose indefinite national service on its people. She also wanted others to believe that the regime demobilized 100,000 soldiers last year although the rest of the world knows the reality:

that these were the young people who escaped taking big risks on their way.



The VOA interviewee, who appeared to agree with security advisors who give exclusive concern to American national interests, mentioned Yemen and other chaotic places in the region and wanted to tell Eritreans that a dictator like Isayas is all what they deserve.

Ms Bruton did not want to mention that the regime has refused to implement a constitution it ratified in 1997; instead she said she was happy to hear from the president that a new constitution will be drafted in the future.

Readers know that the targeted and still unimplemented UN sanctions mainly focused on the travel of regime officials and their bank accounts. It is also known that those nominal "sanctions" had no effect on the regime and the life of the people. But the dictator and his clique used them as an excuse for their utter failure in ruling the country for a quarter of a century. And for little known reasons, Ms Bruton wished to accept as truth this and related brazen excuses and propaganda of the regime. It is really puzzling.

True, Ethiopia has failed to honour the border ruling and that is unjustified action both by the Ethiopian government and its supporters. But that in itself should not have stopped Eritrea from having a constitution and allowing political, economic and other freedoms for its own good. It is for those freedoms that the Eritrean people fought so dearly for 30 long years. Ms Bruton seems to be one of those who won't care what happens to others.

Regrettably, security and national interests of others are given priority to the extremely disquieting situation of the Eritrean people under the most repressive regime in Africa that one can think of at this moment in time.