

Liberty

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

HISTORIC ERITREAN MARCH TO UN GENEVA ASKED



ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CRIMES BY ASMARA REGIME



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DEMONSTRATORS IN GENEVA SUPPORT UN REPORT; CALL FOR CONCRETE ACTION AGAINST REGIME IN ASMARA

On 26 June 2015, Eritreans opposed to Africa's most repressive regime in Asmara trekked to Switzerland in their thousands from all over Europe, and some from North America and the Middle East. It was a historic moment for Eritreans struggling for democratic change.

Everybody was there: young victims of the regime in Eritrea; veterans of the liberation struggle, including the war disabled; mothers with their newly born, widows and widowers who lost their partners because of the regime, and all other categories of the Eritrean diaspora. Notable opposition media outlets like radio Erena, Assena, Medrek and others were there covering the big event alongside correspondents of major world agencies and TV/radio channels. (continued on p.3)

CREDIT TO WHOM IT IS DUE: Way back in 1961, Somalia and Somalis were the first to recognize and support the Eritrean struggle for freedom. Over 50 years later, it was the Somali envoy to UN Geneva, the late Ambassador Yusuf Mohammed Ismael ("Bari-Bari") who first raised the Eritrean case at the UN Human Rights Council as a serious human rights problem that deserved urgent international attention.



The late Ambassador Bari-Bari and Elsa Chyrum

Until his untimely death in the hands of terrorists on 27 March 2015 while on duty visit to Mogadishu, the extraordinary African diplomat championed the plight of Eritreans and the problem created by albinism in Africa and the rest of the world. (Hmm.. We are not even sure if the killers were not somehow connected to the evil regime in Asmara). Led by Ms Elsa Chyrum, a tireless Eritrean human rights activist who closely knew and worked with the deceased, Eritreans and friends paid tribute to the late diplomat in a panel Elsa and partners organized inside the UN Geneva office on 25 June 2015. May his soul rest in peace.

EPDP Chairman, Menghesteab Asmerom, accompanied by five senior leadership members and a big number of senior party cadres and members from all over Europe, was also there alongside many other Eritrean leaders of political and civil society organizations in exile.

Unlike the demonstration of 22 June by regime supporters (with very few youth among them) who were there under pressure and support of 10 regime embassies and consulates in Europe, the 26 June demonstration of Eritrean justice-seekers had a clear message to convey to the international community represented by the UN.



Demonstrators say: than you, UN Inquiry Commission, that you UN Human Rights Council!!

Their placards mentioned all the abuses being perpetrated by the Eritrean authorities against the entire population and demanded for concrete action against dictator Isaias Afewerki and his cruel regime. Demands of the demonstrators were contained in a petition submitted to the president of the UN Human Rights Council.

The petition stated that the thousands of demonstrators were “glad to know that the international community is now paying due attention to the dire state of human rights in Eritrea”. It further noted that although the UN report was an important step forward in the fight to end impunity but demanded that those perpetrators of so many crimes in Eritrea for a prolonged period of time should be brought to a court of justice. (See full text on pages 11-12).

The UN Commission’s report also incited demonstrations in Washington DC on 19 June, and other mass demonstrations on 26 June in Israel and Ethiopia in support of the report.

The Washington demonstrators also addressed a strong message to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon urging him to use his good offices “to help set in motion a thorough investigation on the cause that is driving refugees” from their homeland.

The message stated:

“ We strongly believe that the international community and Europe in particular, needs to translate the expressions of good will voiced in the wake of the Lampedusa tragedy to more concrete actions. Such actions should begin by addressing the causes of the massive migration of refugees from Africa and the Middle East.

“In that spirit, and focusing on the Eritrean refugees, we urge you to bring the considerable moral weight carried by your office to bear on the specific tragedy that has befallen on our unfortunate nation—Eritrea. The cause of the massive exodus of Eritreans is the wrong policy and dangerous



politics pursued by the government of Mr. Isaias Afwerki. Of all the wrong policies of the government that have devastated a once promising nation, the most egregious is the so called National Service, which has pinned down hundreds of thousands of Eritrean youth in what can only be described as forced servitude. Eritrean youth, the cream of the nation, have wasted, and are wasting, their lives in a pointless and unending service. Thousands have chosen to escape from this servitude at huge risk to their lives, including those who perished in the Mediterranean Sea. Though this servitude is the worst policy pursued by the government, we need to understand the overall context of the nature of the state under which it is practiced.

After listing all the abuses of the regime during the past 24 years of its prolonged years in power, the Washington DC demonstrators concluded their petition with these strong words:

« We are, therefore, appealing to you, Mr. Secretary-General, to use your good offices to help set in motion a thorough investigation on the cause that is driving refugees from their beloved homeland. Your leadership, along with that of H.H. Pope Francis, and with the support of leaders of the European Union, African Union, and individual governments, is needed to bring this tragedy to an end. We implore you to take speedy steps toward the accomplishment of this objective”.



ISAIAS AND CLIQUE IN ERITREA LIKELY TO FACE UN CHARGES ON CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

At the end of its one-year searching and collecting evidences by interviewing 550 victims and receiving written submissions from other 160, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea submitted a horrific Eritrea report on 23 June 2015 to the 29th Session of UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. In introducing the shocking 483-page report, Commission chairman, Mike Smith, did not only wish to characterize the regime in Asmara as “the most repressive” in Africa but also summed the dire situation in Eritrea to be “one that can no longer be ignored”.



One of the revealing conclusions of the Commission is that many of the acts of the regime in Eritrea could constitute crimes against humanity. And what else can systematic and wide spread acts of extrajudicial killings; torture, arbitrary detention in inhuman conditions, forced disappearances, and forced labour be termed other than crimes against humanity!!

To expose the real character of the regime, agents of Eritrean embassies in Europe brought another shock to the UN Council session by the acts of intimidation and threats to harm members of the reporting UN Commission.

The first paragraph in the conclusions of the Commission reads as follows:

“The commission finds that systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations have been and are being committed by the Government of Eritrea and that there is no accountability for them. The enjoyment of rights and freedoms are severely curtailed in an overall context of a total lack of rule of law. The commission also finds that the violations in the areas of extrajudicial executions, torture (including sexual torture), national service and forced labour may constitute crimes against humanity”.

Mr. Smith strongly appealed to all UN member states that “human rights conditions must be at the forefront” of any future relation with the regime in Eritrea, adding that “little is changing in the country” to this day. He noted that over 410,000 Eritreans have left the country because of has been going on their in the past several years



The three-member Commission of Inquiry submitted its report to the UN Human Rights Council on 23 June. Its members are Mr Mike Smith of Australia, Mr. Victor Dankwa of Ghana, and Ms Sheila Keetharuth of Mauritius.

In his rebuttal, the Eritrean delegate tried to “falsify” the scathing UN report by claiming a concerted conspiracy of “big enemies” and the so-called state of “no-war-no-peace” that his country is forced to live under. The meeting chairman stopped and reprimanded Mr. Gerhatu for using unacceptable language by alleged “travesty of justice” by the reporting commission charging the Council of “ignorance”.

In the two discussions that pursued, most delegations spoke in support of the report except China, Iran, Sudan, Cuba and Venezuela. Besides the delegation of the European Union which represented 28 EU-member countries, other 19 country-delegates and representatives of nearly a dozen international NGOs voiced their support to the report and made unreserved condemnations of the prolonged abuses of the Eritrean regime.

The countries that wanted to see justice served against the perpetrators of alleged crimes in Eritrea included the Australia, Belgium, Croatia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Ghana, Estonia, the UK, US, France, Spain, Switzerland, Ireland, S. Korea, Norway, Luxemburg, and the Czech Republic.

A draft resolution of the Human Rights Council dated 30 June, which already musters an overwhelming support of the 47 HRC members, condemns the Eritrean regime in very strong terms and extends the mandate of the of the Commission of Inquiry and the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Eritrea for another year.

The inquiry this time will be focused on specifying and identifying the alleged crimes against humanity and those who perpetrated them. This is a huge success for those who have been struggling for democratic change in Eritrea. The factors for change are now being laid down. What remains is a solid mobilization of the positive forces inside and outside the country to make the transition from dictatorship to democracy smooth and a resounding success.

EPDP JOINS FRATERNAL PARTIES AT ROTTERDAM; **VOWS TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN ERITREA**

For the fourth time in two years, a delegation of the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP) led by party chairman, Mr. Menghsteab Asmerom, attended another conference of the Progressive Alliance (PA) this time organized in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, between 22 and 23 May 2015.

The conference had "gender equality and decent work" as its main agenda item and at the end of deliberations adopted a 14-point Action Plan entitled: Gender Equality: Not just words but deeds!". The EPDP signed the document on behalf of its members and of course informally, on behalf of all like-minded individuals and organizations in the Eritrean opposition camp.

Hosted by the Dutch Labour Party in cooperation with the women's wing of Party of European Socialists (PES), the PA conference was attended by 46 fraternal social democratic and labour parties from all over the globe. There were ten African parties at the conference from Angola, Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Morocco, and Tunisia and others.

The EPDP delegation to Rotterdam, which also included Mr. Woldeyesus Ammar, the head of foreign relations; Ms Adiam Teferra-



Mesghinna, member of administration in the party organizational office, and Mr. Mehari Tesfamariam, member of the foreign relations committee, took active part in all plenary and group discussions sessions of the conference.

On the first day, the Steering Committee and delegates of participating parties met in the morning hours and discussed an action plan on gender equality and decent work that shall commit all member parties and organizations to promote it within their parties and in their respective countries. Mr. Konstantin Woinoff, the PA coordinator from the German SPD chaired the meeting which gave all participant parties the opportunity to explain situations in their respective countries in the effort of finalizing the document. The disquieting situation in Eritrea and the plight of Eritreans fleeing the sad condition at home were adequately presented at the session.

It is true that when delegations of the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP) attend a regional or international conference - like the ones they participated in recent years in Niamey, Leipzig, Stockholm, Tunis and Rotterdam - they present not a party message but that of Eritrea - a loud voice of Eritrea and its people.



EPDP delegation members flanking Mr. Mustafa Ben Jafer, leader of the social democratic Ettakatul party who headed the drafting of the Tunisian constitution, and Mr. Ahmed Abutaleb, the mayor of Rotterdam City.

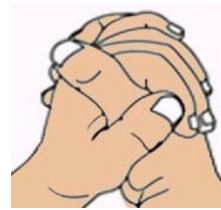


Ms Adiam Teferi with Dutch Labour Party international secretary, Kirsten Meijer; second picture shows EPDP delegation members with other African delegates at the conference in Rotterdam.

While in Rotterdam, the EPDP delegation did not only hold a public meeting to discuss hot Eritrean issues of the hour but also took time to meet with Eritrean figures and youth groups to discuss the common concerns in greater depth.



Pvda



At the last leg of its mission to the Netherlands, the delegation on 26 May 2015 held intensive talks with concerned officials of the Dutch Labour Party at its headquarters in Amsterdam.

ABUSES BY ERITREAN REGIME DISCUSSED

ALSO INSIDE THE GERMAN PARLIAMENT

On 10 June 2015, only two days after the horrifying UN Eritrea report was released in Geneva, the major German parties in the German Parliament/the Bundestag, showed a rare unity to unanimously condemn the brutal actions of the dictatorship in Eritrea.

Representatives of the ruling CDU/CSU, the main opposition party SPD as well as the Green Party and the Left party expressed their shock over the UN report on Eritrea and used the strong terms possible to denounce “the Eritrea tyrant Isaias Afewerki, for blatant abuse of human rights” against his own people.

The day’s agenda item was 'Current Affairs Hour' and the sole topic was: STOP HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN ERITREA. Among other things, the parliamentarians called for increased support to Eritreans fleeing tyranny at home. They also warned the German Minister of Economic Development and Cooperation, who announced his intention to visit Eritrea soon, “not to come back with a report based on bogus promises and statements made by some representatives of the Eritrea tyrant”.

Meanwhile, the EPDP and a sister charity registered in Germany issued a joint statement addressed to the concerned minister with copies to the Bundestag and German parties.

The German Minister for Economic Development and Cooperation, Dr. Gerd Mueller, is planned to visit Eritrea soon leading a Federal German delegation intending to talk to authorities in Asmara. The minister was already warned by a joint statement of German parties in the Bundestag (Federal German Parliament) that he should “not come back with a report based on bogus promises and statements made by some representatives of Eritrean tyrant”.



Economy Minister Mueller and Foreign Minister Steinmeier receive joint EHRRA-EPDP appeal.

On their part, the Eritrean Human Rights and Refugee Advocacy (EHRRA), a German-based and legally registered non-profit charity, and the Eritrean People’s Democratic Party (EPDP), urged the German Minister for Economic Development and Cooperation, Dr Gerd Mueller, and the German coalition government to refrain from prolonging the suffering of the Eritrean people by engaging in appeasement with and giving support to the evil regime in Asmara. The message was conveyed in a joint memo dated 17 June 2015.

The memorandum was prepared by seizing the opportunity of the planned visit to Eritrea by Dr. Gerd Mueller as well as the strong Bundestag discussion on the situation of human rights in Eritrea and its strong support to the damning report issued by the UN Commission of Inquiry which is about to be adopted soon at the 29th Session of the 47-member UN Commission for Human Rights.

The joint EPDP-EHRRRA memorandum, which was also copied to Mr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the German Foreign Minister, and through him to the Federal Government, made it clear that appeasement with and unconditional support to the dictatorial regime in Asmara will not solve the problem but, instead, prolong the suffering of the Eritrean people.

The memorandum also urged the German Government and its Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation to seriously consider taking action on the following requests:

1. The Federal German Government to oppose any gesture of appeasement and support to the dictatorship in Eritrea;

2. Germany to start an open engagement with Eritrean political and civil society non-state actors in the diaspora with the aim of empowering them to take part in a democratic transition in Eritrea;

Your esteemed Ministry (i.e. the Federal German Government) to take the initiative of establishing a solid programme for Eritrean refugees in Eastern Sudan and Northern Ethiopia by involving the support of EU and UN agencies. Such a huge programme for thousands of desperate refugees should include not only the provision of adequate food, shelter, health facilities and security, but also basic academic and vocational education to the big number of young Eritrean refugees in the Horn of Africa. Additional resources to this package programme can be obtained by rechanneling the development assistance funds suspended from reaching the Asmara regime.

THE GUARDIAN VIEW ON ERITREA: A REGIME OF TERROR

The international media adequately highlighted in their news and editorial columns the report of the UN Commission of Inquiry when it was released on 8 June. The well respected British magazine, The Guardian, in its 10 June issue had the following strong editorial.

The EU may be saving lives in the Mediterranean but it is turning a blind eye to the political repression in Africa's worst dictatorship.

Europe's response to the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean has rightly – if belatedly – focused on saving lives. Not a week goes by now without thousands of Africans, Asians and refugees from the Middle East being rescued off the coast of Italy by European ships. That is the welcome result of a humanitarian effort decided in late April, after a series of tragedies at sea had pushed EU leaders to act at last. But it would be dangerous to suppose that the deeper problem has been addressed. Europe deals only with the symptoms of migration, not its root causes. Eritrea is a striking case in point.

This east African nation of 6 million people is now one of the biggest sources of migrants who take the perilous journey into Sudan and then across Libya before finally setting out to sea towards Europe's shores. There is no civil war in Eritrea, nor has there been an international military intervention. What Eritreans desperately try to escape is a dictatorship that sounds close to being Africa's equivalent of North Korea. The UN's inquiry on human rights in Eritrea, in a damning report published earlier this week, found what it called "a pervasive control system used in absolute

arbitrariness to keep the population in a state of permanent anxiety”. It describes torture, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, indefinite military conscription, forced labour. It is a comprehensive description of how President Isaias Afwerki, in power for 23 years, rules through fear.

In the face of the systematic inhumanity of his regime, Europe has turned a blind eye. Even worse, the EU has in recent months decided on a new development aid package to Eritrea, worth over €300m. The argument is that financial support will help stem the flow of asylum seekers pouring out of the country. But it is not likely to work like that. Rather, the aid will first feed the cynicism of a dictatorial system only too happy to feel vindicated in its twisted assertion that Eritreans are migrating for predominantly economic reasons, not political ones. Second, such a policy does nothing to relieve those who so desperately need urgent help. Europe is not only compromising its own values by turning a blind eye to tyranny, it is rewarding a regime with aid instead of thinking strategically.

Any reading of the UN report should tear down this convenient myth. The EU must base its action not on wishful thinking but on the report’s core conclusion, which is that crimes against humanity may be being committed in Eritrea. This means that European governments, including the UK’s, that have tried to cast Eritreans as economic migrants, must seriously consider changing course. If Eritreans are fleeing persecution, Europe’s obligation is to be open to them, not to retreat behind false representations. If aid is to be delivered, it must come with strict obligations attached. There may be no easy solution to Eritrea’s domestic situation, but the very least one should expect from Europe is to recognise the facts: it is a totalitarian state whose refugees are not, or not only, in search of work but who are fleeing a very real terror.

PETITION OF GENEVA DEMONSTRATORS CONVEYED WISHES OF JUSTICE SEEKERS

The organizing committee of the historic June 26 demonstration of justice-seeking Eritreans in Geneva submitted a petition to the UN Human Rights Council fully supporting the report of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea and urging for concrete action against the cruel regime in Asmara.

The petition stated that the thousands of demonstrators were “glad to know that the international community is now paying due attention to the dire state of human rights in Eritrea”. It further noted that although the UN report was an important step forward in the fight to end impunity but demanded that those perpetrators of so many crimes in Eritrea for a prolonged period of time should be brought to a court of justice.



Below is the full text of the petition submitted on behalf of thousands of Eritreans who trekked to Geneva that day from many countries in Europe as well as some from North America and the Middle East. ***

Adopt appropriate measures to end impunity in Eritrea!!

Your Excellency President of the UN Human Rights Council,

This letter is addressed to you by a huge crowd of justice-seeking Eritrean exiles, who are congregating in Geneva on the 26th of June 2015, for a mass demonstration that conveys our unflinching support to the report of the UN-mandated Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea (COIE).

We are conducting our mass demonstration at a time when the crisis of human rights in Eritrea has reached a very crucial level, which involves a possible situation of crimes against humanity. We are glad to know that the international community is now paying due attention to the dire state of human rights in Eritrea. While we see this as a very important development in our fight to end impunity, we also note that some crucial measures still need to be taken urgently in order to avoid further human suffering in our country.

We therefore call on the Human Rights Council to ensure that those most responsible for a possible situation of crimes against humanity in Eritrea are held accountable pursuant to the existing legal framework of international criminal justice. Indeed, it is time for the international community to devise appropriate methods by which accountability for gross human rights violations is ensured meaningfully. Such measures shall include, among other things, the adoption of effective targeted sanctions against those who appear to be most responsible for a possible situation of crimes against humanity in Eritrea.

As noted by the report of the COIE, we also urge the Human Right Council to adopt appropriate follow-up measures, with a view to providing conclusive findings on the issue of crimes against humanity in Eritrea. In this regard, we also believe that the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur (Ms. Sheila B Keetharuth) is another important step.

Pending the adoption of appropriate accountability measures, we urge the HRC to give due consideration to the Eritrean refugee crisis, by advising recipient countries to continue providing appropriate legal protection to all Eritrean asylum seekers and refugees wherever they are.

