

HUMAN RIGHTS AND ERITREA'S REALITY

6/4/13

Context is Everything



E-SMART

Eritrean Sanctions
Must be Annulled &
Repealed Today!

The Global E-SMART Movement
<http://www.eritrean-smart.org>
esmart@eritrean-smart.org
600 L Street, NW, Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20001

Global Eritrean Movement Against Unjust Sanctions

The Special Rapporteur Report on the situation of human rights in Eritrea was expected to be the result of a thorough, accurate and impartial investigation in line with the mandate from the Council. However, it falls far short of that goal. The report affirms that the SR depended wholesale on tons of misinformation and disinformation manufactured and circulated over the last decade and half by the sworn historical enemies of the Eritrean people—the same forces now shedding crocodile tears about human rights in this young, struggling African nation. It clearly tries to advance a political agenda designed by those who used all their resources to deny the Eritrean people their basic rights for nearly six decades. This is just another ploy—war by other means—aimed at Eritrea's sovereignty to reverse the rights for which the Eritrean people have paid so much in blood and treasure. We therefore urge members of the UN Human Rights Council to reject this politically motivated report which falls far short of the goals set for it. The Council has an obligation to ensure a thorough, accurate and impartial process of investigation by its rapporteurs into the conditions of human rights in any country to protect the integrity of its mission. It shouldn't allow the process or the outcome to be politicized. Unfortunately, the work of the Special Rapporteur in this case was neither thorough nor accurate or impartial.

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Human Rights and Eritrea's Reality

CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

LETTER SENT TO UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL MEMBERS

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea is presenting her “report” to the UN Human Rights Council on 4 June 2013. Though this report was expected to be the result of a thorough, accurate and impartial investigation in line with the mandate from the Council, it falls far short of the goal. In fact, it has all the characteristics of a deplorable cut-and-paste job drawing on the piles of misinformation fabricated and orchestrated by Eritrea's historical enemies over the last decade and half. It is for this reason that we urge the members of the UN Human Rights Council to reject the report that clearly tries to advance a political agenda designed by those who used all their resources to deny the Eritrean people their basic rights for nearly six decades. This is just another ploy—war by other means—aimed at Eritrea's sovereignty to reverse the rights for which the Eritrean people have paid so much in blood and treasure.

The Eritrean community in the Diaspora had expected the Special Rapporteur, as an independent fact finder, to adhere to a higher standard of investigation. We had expected the employment in her investigation of nothing less than a solid due process that is characterized by a clearly defined notice and hearing procedures, objectivity and reasonableness. Our organization, like the many other Eritrean Diaspora organizations and individuals that had written to her voicing their desire and demand to see a fair, balanced and just assessment by her of the human rights situation in Eritrea, is a stakeholder and as such had hoped to engage her so as to urge her to follow a strict adherence to the principles of fairness, justice and impartiality when conducting her duties; alas, to our dismay, this is not the case.

In fact, her report is devoid of any semblance of integrity whatsoever. As was indicated in her press release which amounted to a preemption of the purpose of her investigation, regurgitating the same wild, fabricated charges about Eritrea, her report affirms that she depended wholesale on tons of misinformation and disinformation manufactured and circulated over the last decade by the sworn historical enemies of the Eritrean people—the same forces now shedding crocodile tears about human rights in this young, struggling African nation.

We are also equally disappointed to learn, through the emails that she sent in response to queries from the members of our community that she was unable to travel to Europe or to the USA to meet with the Eritrean communities in these regions as part of her fact finding mission; yet she made a point to visit only Ethiopia and Djibouti when she should and could have visited many other countries, where larger Eritrean communities reside and naturally would be under less duress to relate true stories.

We want to underscore that Eritreans waged their long struggle for independence to secure their human rights, rights that were trampled upon by successive Italian, British and Ethiopian rulers. It was also to secure their human rights that they were forced to fend off an Ethiopian aggression in 1998-2000. In this last war, Eritreans and people of Eritrean origin suffered ethnic cleansing, deportation and forced displacement as the International community watched in silence.

Eritrea, under the circumstance is doing the best it can to secure the rights of every Eritrean without regards to religion, ethnic background, gender or class and the fact that Eritreans are active participants in their own affairs, and that Eritrea has met 7 of the 8 UN Millennium Development Goals are also growing indicators of Eritrea's continued commitment to human rights, despite all the arresting conditions it finds itself in. This is worthy of praise not condemnation. Furthermore, cutting and pasting accusations from the scripts of the same forces that had denied Eritreans their rights for decades should never be mistaken for helping human rights in Eritrea.

We find the Special Rapporteur's report to be a disingenuous assessment of Eritrea's reality and has taken many issues out of context to serve the political agenda of those who pushed for the investigation to take place.

We therefore urge you as a member of the UN Human Rights Council to reject this politically motivated report which falls far short of the goals you set for it. The Council has an obligation to ensure a thorough, accurate and impartial process of investigation by its rapporteurs into the conditions of human rights in any country to protect the integrity of its mission. It shouldn't allow the process or the outcome to be politicized. Unfortunately, the work of the Special Rapporteur in this case was neither thorough nor accurate or impartial.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Eritrean Global Movement Against Unjust Sanctions is submitting this document because it had hoped to engage, the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Eritrea, as an independent fact finder, so that she can adhere to a higher standard of investigation, despite early signs to the contrary. We had expected the employment in her investigation of nothing less than a solid due process that is characterized by a clearly defined notice and hearing procedures, objectivity and reasonableness. Our movement, like the many other Diaspora Eritrean organizations and individuals that had written to her voicing their desire and demand to see a fair, balanced and just assessment of the human rights situation in Eritrea, hopes to see a strict adherence to the principles of fairness, justice and impartiality from the UN Human Rights Council. Nearly 200 Eritrean organizations in the diaspora had tried to engage the Special Rapporteur asking her to give them time to talk to her, excerpts of about 25 of them are included in Annex 1, her response, usually after a month delay, was that she was not able to come to Europe or the US. Sample's her generic responses are in Annex 2. It is after learning that she was not willing to meet with the main stakeholders, and reading her report we are forced to compile this preliminary document for the benefit of Council members and other interested parties.

The Special Rapporteur's report regurgitates the same wild and unfounded charges about Eritrea fabricated and being orchestrated over the last decade and half by Eritrean people's sworn enemies. Enemies who through an active and complicit help of some powerful allies and silence of indifference of others have brought enumerable human rights abuses on a hard working, God fearing population.

We are equally disappointed to learn, through the emails that she sent to some members of our community, that she was not willing to travel to Europe or to the USA to meet with the real stakeholders as part of her fact finding mission. Instead she chose to investigate issues in Eritrea from Mauritius, the conference halls of Banjul and Geneva as well as the libraries of Ethiopia. To add insult to injury her mission was limited to Ethiopia and Djibouti when she should and could have visited many other countries, where larger Eritrean communities reside. It is obvious that her mission has been compromised due to her inability to travel to at least the major cities in the world where larger Eritrean communities reside and could relate their stories without duress. As an independent fact finder and, more importantly, as a lawyer, we had expect her to adhere to a higher standard of care. We had expected the employment in her investigation of nothing less than a solid due process that is characterized by a clearly defined notice and hearing procedures, objectivity and reasonableness.

However, instead of going where the facts lead her, and doing her best to corroborate the stories she was told, she decided to do it the lazy way: lift, wholesale, form the pile up disinformation that had been written about Eritrea by some politically motivated groups.

We want to underline from the outset, this whole exercise didn't originate out of desire to help human rights in Eritrea, but to punish Eritrea for standing to the powers that are dominating the world today. These same powers that not long ago where trading people created in the image of God like any animal, and even today cannot swallow the fact that "all people are created equal" are now attempting to play judge, witness and jury, to condemn countries. We would like to express our dismay that the UN Human Rights Council has allowed itself to be used as a political tool to punish Eritrea for not toeing the line of some powerful members of the Council. This is unacceptable. That is why we are submitting this document, highlighting the historical and socio-political realities pertaining to Eritrea and the Eritrean people.

Eritrea is a nation striving to secure its sovereignty from an attack of a neighbor whose war-machine is well greased by the billions of direct and indirect aid it receives from nations that are writing all the unsubstantiated report about Eritrea. It is as an express manifestation of their continued hostilities, the

powerful members of the Council rammed the appointment of a Special Rapporteur, even though it was clear it was a politically motivated decision. The hostilities of these forces is designed to serve as an obstruction to Eritrea's desire to live with dignity, in harmony, enjoying peace and security, and charting their organic path of social justice and democracy. It has become crystal clear Eritrea's sworn enemies don't want to see the realization of these noble objectives. In spite of all the unwarranted hostilities it is facing and arresting conditions it finds itself in, Eritrea is making a commendable stride despite this should be worthy of commendation not condemnation.

We can assure you that what A/HRC/RES/20/20 has listed cannot be any further from the reality that exists in Eritrea today, and these issues are not something can investigate sitting in Mauritius and reading reports. In this vein, we want to state that we are categorically opposed to A/HRC/RES/20/20 of 6 July 2012 and A/HRC/RES/21/1 of 26 September 2012 resolutions issued by the UN Human Rights Council.

Labeling Eritrea as a country with "*widespread and systematic violations*" of human rights and a place where "*grave violations of human rights by the Eritrean authorities against their own population and fellow citizens, including violations of civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights, and the alarming number of civilians fleeing Eritrea as a result of those violations*" is not only far from the truth, but also is an accusation lifted off the script of the enemies of Eritrea, the very same forces that have been denying the people of Eritrea their basic human rights for more than seven decades.

Contrary to all the allegations submitted and the offensive wording of A/HRC/RES/20/20, Eritreans are lucky to have a government that is working day and night to ensure that their fundamental rights are guaranteed—the right to liberty, democracy, dignity, security, prosperity, food security, health, education, and equally but more important harmony across religious, ethnic and gender lines.

We would like to tell you, as members of the Eritrean community in the Diaspora that frequently visit Eritrea, follow every detail of events and actively participate and contribute to the development efforts in Eritrea, all the accusations that are being leveled against Eritrea are false and baseless. They are devoid of facts. Eritrean reality is being taken out of context and distorted without recognition and some issues are blown out of proportion to serve the political agenda of Eritrea's enemies.

In short, we are writing this document in order to set the record straight and to put issues in their proper context. Attached are statements of facts, which we believe you will find helpful in considering the prevalent situation in Eritrea. In this short document we will try to show the thread of human rights abuse Eritreans endured starting from colonial times to the end of Ethiopian rule in 1991. Ethiopia's 1998-2000 war of invasion, its non-compliance with the final and binding boundary decision and continuous occupation of Eritrean territory constitutes is a gross violation of Human Rights. The UN sanctions and the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Eritrea are designed to shield Ethiopia from these gross violations. There is no worse abuse to a population than living under a constant threat of war. Thus all peace-loving members of the Council ought to see beneath the veil and expose and condemn the conspiracy that is going on against Eritrea. Djibouti, Nigeria, and Somalia are being used as tools.

Finally, in the interest of protecting the integrity of the Council, we urge you to reject the report and not renew her mandate, not only had he failed the people of Eritrea, she has also failed the UN Human Rights Council.

Writing a report concerning human rights in Eritrea without understanding the nature of its struggle for independence, and without walking in its shoes, will not make one an expert on issues of Human Rights. All freedom-loving Eritreans fought, bled, and died to usher the respect of Human Rights for all Eritreans. It is unfortunate that some powerful countries are ganging up against Eritrea using the UN as their tool. This is unacceptable; it has to change.

HISTORICAL INJUSTICE AND VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Eritrea, the size of the England, “is defined by a series of harmoniously co-existing dualisms - geography (highland and lowland), religion (Christianity and Islam), and socio-economic groups (sedentary cultivators and agro pastoralists). It is comprised of nine ethno-linguistic communities coming together as a national identity. Eritrea’s geographic location in the Horn of Africa renders great strategic and economic importance. Lying along the Red Sea, Eritrea shares with Yemen and Djibouti the Bab el Mandeb chokepoint between the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, through which important maritime routes pass to Europe, Asia and North America.”¹

Eritrea’s strategic location along the Red Sea has been both a blessing and a curse. A blessing because Eritrea is at the crossroads where Asia and Africa meet. It has been blessed having the best of both the African and Asian interaction as well as European excursion. A curse because the country has been a target of hegemonic forces who desire to dominate the shipping lanes of the Red Sea. Because of this, Eritrea had been a target of the capitalist west and the communist east. Not only these, Eritrea has been a target of international terrorists and religious extremists who want the country to be governed by religious laws in place of secular rule. However, though the nation is evenly divided between Christians and Muslims, and despite continuous attempts by external forces to sow seeds of civil strife, Eritrea has remained an oasis of stability in the volatile Horn of Africa region.

Like many African countries, modern Eritrea is a child of European colonialism. Eritrea’s encounter with European colonialism begins in 1869 when a Catholic missionary, Giuseppe Sapeto, serving as an agent of the Italian government, but using the cover of the ‘Rubattino Shipping Company’, using Italian government money, purchased a plot of land in southeastern Eritrea near the modern port of Assab. Here is how one scholar put this “missionary-colonialism collusion” that is way too familiar in history.

“Sapeto had in fact always been an active advocate of European penetration. He had even promoted French colonial activity in the days before Italian unification. After 1866, his efforts were directed towards developing Italian colonial interests. As the Suez Canal neared completion, he visualized the establishment of a coaling station and a port of call for Italian steamships in the Red Sea – he hoped to find a site that might become both ‘an emporium’ and a port of call strategically well suited. Sapeto convinced Menabrea, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, and King Vittorio Emmanuele, of the value of a port of call. In the Autumn of 1869, he was sent by the Government to the Red Sea, together with Admiral Acton, to look for a suitable site and arrange for its purchase. ... He decided on the ‘purchase’ of Assab, and on November 15, 1869 an agreement was signed at Nasser-Mejid between Sapeto and the two brothers Sultan Ibrahim Ben Ahmad and Hassan Ben Ahmed to ‘cede’ a territory lying between Mount Ganga and Cape Lumah.”²

From this small purchase, the Italians, like the proverbial Arabian camel, slowly by slowly surely took over the whole of modern Eritrea in 20 years and on 1st January 1890, they declared to the world, Eritrea as their first African colony (prima colonia italiana). Like other European colonists, Italian colonialism is replete with abuse of Eritrean human rights. From their attempt to wipe every Eritrean resistance between 1898 and 1900 they killed or imprisoned 12 chiefs and over 800 of their followers.³ One

¹ Eritrean-SMART, <http://www.eritrean-smart.org/content/onus-sanctions-eritrea-latest-chapter-long-history-injustice>

² Yemane Mesghenna, Italian Colonialism: A Case Study of Eritrea 1869-1934. Motives, Praxis and Result. International Graphics, Maryland, 1989 at 72-73.

³ Zemhret Yohannes, Italian Colonialism in Eritrea 1882-1941 (in Tigrigna), Hidri Publishers, 2010.

source has a list of 240 of those who perished at the notorious island prison of Nakura⁴. to demanding to take Eritrean women as sex-slaves for their soldiers, to confiscating every fertile land and giving it to Italian settlers, Eritrean history is full of European dehumanizing of Africans for which they have yet to apologize or pay reparations for.

In 1941 the British occupied Eritrea by defeating the Italians. As soon as they took over Eritrea, the British colonial powers worked hard to dismember Eritrea and to sow discord along ethnic and religious lines. Brigadier General Stephen H. Longrigg, Chief Administrator of Eritrea, 1942-44, was one of the key architects of this evil plan. In tandem with the Ethiopians, he used both overt and covert means to make Eritrea as unstable as possible so that his plan could be implemented. As one part of his evil scheme, on August 3, 1944, he wrote an article in the Eritrean Weekly Gazette using the penname "concerned Eritrean", where he gave a diatribe how since Eritrea is religiously, ethnically and linguistically cleaved, it had no chance of surviving as a unit. This to a country, that had only two religions, nine ethnic groups and no history of fighting along these lines but a millennia of coexistence. Compared to any other African colony, Eritrea had no problems that the British was warning of. His proposal: was in fact that the western lowlands needed to go to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and the highlands to Ethiopia. This evil British plan and mindset was what caused Eritreans to carry an untold pain and suffering for 50 years. In 1945 Longrigg brought his idea to the open with the following pathetic words in a history book he wrote on Eritrea:

*"It seems, then that the single Eritrea of today is doomed. Dismemberment, in some form and to some extent, must be the alternative. If this is so—and the evident racial and cultural and historical diversities suggest it—it must be in favour of the two greater neighbours of the territory, the Sudan and Ethiopia."*⁵

Besides attempting to dismember Eritrea, the British Military Administration was also determined to render Eritrea economically unviable. To "prove" that Eritrea's economy was too weak to survive independently, it systematically set out to destroy Eritrea's economy through a wanton plunder. According to Araia Tseggai,

*"Entire factories, transportation facilities, radio stations, port facilities and other heavy equipments" were sold to the highest bidder. A cement factory producing 1000 tons per day was sold to the Sudan; scrap metal from over a thousand homes in Massawa was sold to Yemen, in the process dynamiting the port city of Massawa. Equipment from about 20 radio stations was sold to different countries; a floating dry dock with two huge cranes used for ship repair was sold to Pakistan; Malta and Egypt bought two big cranes; 16 large boats were sold to Italy and Saudi Arabia. A salt factory from the port of Assab, potash mining factory from Mersa Fatma; oil drilling machinery from the island of Nocra, more than 300 railway wagons together with railway construction supplies that were designed to connect the Eritrean town of Akordat with the Ethiopian town of Gondar, and the motors of the cable transport system that linked Massawa with Asmara were all auctioned to countries like Israel, Yemen (Aden), Kenya, Egypt and the Sudan. Overall, the British government earned over 19.5 million dollars from the illegal sale of pieces of Eritrean equipment."*⁶

⁴ Yisaq Yosief, *Eritrean Heroes and Culture* (in Tigrigna), Commercial Printing Press, 1997

⁵ Stephen H. A. Longrigg, *A Short History of Eritrea*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1945, p. 172.

⁶ Araia Tseggai, *The Economic Viability of an Independent Eritrea*. Ph. D. Dissertation, the University of Nebraska, July 1981, pp. 150-152.

In May 1949, the British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, and the then Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Carlo Conte Sforza proposed the Bevin-Sforza Plan to make what Longrigg was advocating for a decade. According to the plan, Eritrea was to be partitioned into two: the western lowland was to be merged with the Sudan (then under British control) and the remaining, and highland Eritrea and eastern lowland to be merged with Ethiopia.

On December 2, 1950, the UN through Resolution 390 A (V), imposed a federal arrangement for Eritrea making Eritrea the only former European colony in Africa to be denied the right of decolonization. This unjust resolution was passed despite the objections of more than 75% of the Eritrean people who wanted independence. The then US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, callously stated this politically motivated decision using these infamous words: *"From the point of view of justice, the opinions of the Eritrean people must receive consideration. Nevertheless, the strategic interests of the United States in the Red Sea Basin and considerations of security and world peace make it necessary that the country [Eritrea] has to be linked with our ally, Ethiopia."*⁷

In addition to its being contrary to Eritreans' expressed desire for total independence, the UN imposed federal arrangement was also "defective in that it was a federation in name only. The arrangement was designed to place Eritrea **"under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown"** and not as a partner in the federation of two autonomous entities. The "federal" arrangement provided Ethiopia with the mechanism and incentive to undermine Eritrean rights. This was a marriage of unequals. The federation period was marked by a systematic erosion of Eritrean rights including the weakening and/or outright banning of trade unions, political parties, the press and other democratic institutions, the suppression of Eritrean languages, and the dismantling of businesses and factories from Eritrea and moved them to Ethiopia. And when in 1962, the government of Ethiopia unilaterally abrogated the federal arrangement and annexed Eritrea, reducing it to a mere province of Ethiopia, in an obvious violation of the Federal Act, not a single voice of dissent was heard from the U.S., the United Nations, or other international organizations."⁸

When all peaceful avenues to preserve their democratic rights and to assert their rights to self-determination and independence were exhausted, the people of Eritrea resorted to a protracted armed struggle. At first it was U.S. military and political support that sustained the Ethiopian government's hold on Eritrea. According to Jeffrey A. Lefebvre,

"Between 1953 and 1977 Ethiopia received, over 80 percent of the Military Assistance Program (MAP), more than 55 percent of the International Military Education and Training Program (IMETP), and about one-fifth of Foreign Military Sales (FMS) financing funds allocated to sub-Saharan Africa. Ethiopia also accounted for approximately one-third of FMS cash arms transfers approved by Washington for Africa. Even with the proliferation of American security assistance programs throughout the African continent during the 1970s, more than 45 percent of total U.S. arms transfers to sub-Saharan Africa were designated for Ethiopia."⁹

The U.S. desire to secure a communication facility at Kagnaw station in Asmara, Eritrea, which was a vital U.S. intelligence link, was the driving force for the U.S. betrayal of the Eritrean people in favor of Ethiopia and for working to systematically violate Eritrean people's human rights. Ethiopia's alliance with

⁷ Heiden, Lynda, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence*. *Monthly Review*, 30 (2) (June 1978), page 15

⁸ Eritrean-SMART, <http://www.eritrean-smart.org/content/unus-sanctions-eritrea-latest-chapter-long-history-injustice>

⁹ Lefebvre, Jeffrey A. *Arms For the Horn: U.S. Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia 1953-1991*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991, pp. 13-14.

and support of the U.S. in the Korean War and the Congo civil war were additional factors. All these led to, by the mid 1960s, Washington “making Ethiopia the first black-ruled state in sub-Saharan Africa to possess supersonic jet fighters.” Even when Ethiopia went “communist” under the military regime (**Derg**) in the late 1970s, US political support to Ethiopia continued under the “the Israeli security agreement,” that is, for Ethiopia was perceived to be fighting against Arab radicals that threatened Israel’s security. Eritrea’s legitimate struggle for independence was also cast in this light of the U.S.-Israeli policy, as the following statement clearly indicates:

“An independent Eritrean state would adopt a pro-Arab, anti-Israel foreign policy orientation. ... Tel Aviv viewed the Eritrean civil war [sic] as a southerly extension of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel’s strategic objective in Ethiopia, therefore, was quite simple and dovetailed with U.S. and Ethiopian interests - to prevent the emergence of an independent Eritrean state. ... The Israeli security argument, as presented in Washington, was based upon a worst-case analysis constructed by Israeli defense officials. It envisioned the Red Sea being converted into an Arab lake in the event of an Eritrean victory in the civil war [sic].”¹⁰

The human suffering on Eritrean people due to Ethiopian rule were immense. The war of independence lasted for 30 years, costing Eritrea dearly—more than 250,000 Eritreans lost their lives, about 65,000 of them were young Eritreans who sacrificed their lives for their peoples’ cause. Over 10,000 young men and women became severely disabled war veterans. Practically every Eritrean family has lost a member during the war. More than 753,000 Eritreans took refuge in the Sudan and other nearby countries, and many continued their journey to the West.¹¹ Another 600,000 Eritreans were internally displaced as the country was laid to waste.

Among the innumerable and hundreds of thousands of Eritreans that were killed by Ethiopian egregious atrocities Annex 3 had attempted to cite some, not because of the numbers, but because the way the way the murders were committed:¹² By the way, the archives of the Ethiopian government are full of details on how these crimes against humanity were carried. To the human and material losses and economic devastation, should be added the psychological damage, and the systematic destruction of the cultural, institutional and intellectual resources of the Eritrean population should be added.

It is Ethiopia that has exacted such a huge human and material loss on Eritrea that is now, in collusion with its allies accusing Eritrea of non-existent human rights abuse. It has to be noted that Ethiopia has yet to apologize or pay reparations for all of its acts of genocide and wanton destruction wrought on Eritrea during its 40 years of colonial occupation.

ERITREA’S RECORD BETWEEN THE TWO WARS

Before Ethiopia’s second war of aggression in 1998, and occupation of sovereign Eritrean territory, Eritrea’s trajectory on ensuring human dignity, security and development, was something the western media was singing praise daily. Annex 4 has some of these. The moment the war began, Ethiopia’s propagandist machine directed by well paid lobbyists in Washington, coupled with some powerful western allies started to paint a non-existent picture and they took it upon them to demonize Eritrea’s

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 113

¹¹ EPLF Foreign Relation. *Eritrea: General Facts*. Eritrea, 1989. Two years before independence, there were about 600, 000 refugees in the Sudan, 100, 000 in the Middle East, 30, 000 in Europe, 17, 000 in the USA, hundreds in Australia, and 6,000 in other countries.

¹² Ibid.

leadership and to destabilize Eritrea. Lest some have forgotten what the western media used to say about Eritrea, Annex 4 has a sample to help put the issues in context. What Eritrea needs is a true appraisal of the main issues at the heart of the troubles in the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia's continued occupation of Eritrean territories and its reckless desire to see a Somalia out of Eritrea.

ERITREA-ETHIOPIA WAR OF 1998-2000

On May 13, 2013 Ethiopia, under a pretext of a border dispute, declared a second war on Eritrea. The war lasted for two years, causing a lot of human suffering and property loss. The shooting war only ended when the two countries signed the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement on June 18, 2000. However, the war is still going on by other means. Ethiopia has yet to rescind its war declaration; and the UN sanctions and bogus accusation of human rights abuse in Eritrea are the result of this ongoing war between the two nations. At this time, the situation between two countries is one of "no war, no peace".

In 12 December 2000, Eritrea and Ethiopia signed the Algiers Agreement. The agreement was signed under the auspices of the OAU, and the UN, with the USA, EU and the Government of Algeria as witnesses and guarantors of the Agreement. Article 4(2) of the agreement states, "A neutral Boundary Commission composed of five members shall be established with a mandate to delimit and demarcate the border **based on pertinent colonial treaties** (1900, 1902, and 1908) and **applicable international law**. The Commission shall not have the power to make decisions *ex aequo et bono*." The Agreement further stipulated, "The parties agree that the delimitation and demarcation determinations of the Commission shall be **final and binding**." (Terms italicized here for emphasis.)

First, the mandate of the Boundary Commission was quite specific. It was "to delimit and demarcate on the basis of **pertinent colonial treaties**." The Agreement also specifies that the colonial border treaties of 1900, 1902 and 1908 were going to be the basis for the border adjudication.

Second, and perhaps most significant, was that the two parties had agreed that the Commission's decision was going to be **final and binding**.

A commission, the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC), was duly established in accordance with the Algiers' Agreement. It was comprised of five neutral, prominent jurists (legal experts) with impeccable credentials. The Commission staying within its mandate, providing the two parties the opportunity to present their cases in an adversarial proceeding; and weighing all the evidence presented to it by the parties, followed pertinent rules of international law in its adjudication proceedings and rendered its delimitation decision on April 13, 2002. What followed afterwards is a clear demonstration of Ethiopia's and its Allies' modus operandi.

Eritrea immediately accepted the Commission's decision and expressed its readiness to implement it. Ethiopia, on the other hand, after initially making misleading statements of acceptance, refused to abide by the decision in violation of international law and defiance of global opinion, and continues to occupy Eritrea's territory to this day. In a letter to the UN Security Council, the late Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, stated:

"The Commission's decision is illegal, unjust and irresponsible. ...It is unimaginable for the Ethiopian people to accept such a blatant miscarriage of justice. The decision is thus a recipe for continued instability, and even recurring wars. ... Nothing worthwhile can therefore be expected from the Commission to salvage the peace process. Indeed, the Commission seems to be determined to continue its disastrous stance whatever the consequence to the peace of the region.... As the Commission's decisions could inevitably lead the two countries into another

round of fratricidal war, the Security Council has an obligation, arising out of the UN Charter, to avert such a threat to regional peace and stability.”¹³

Thus, not only did Meles Zenawi express his country's refusal to abide by the decision, but essentially trashed the good work of a reputable commission, the EEBC. The EEBC's response to this letter was articulated by its President's (Sir Elihu Lauterpacht) letter to the Security Council on 7 October 2003, where among other things he stated that:

“Ethiopia proposes that ‘an alternative mechanism to demarcate the contested parts of the boundary’ be set up. Such an alternative mechanism would involve a departure from, and thus an amendment to, the terms of Article 4.2 of the Algiers Agreement, which gives the Commission the mandate to demarcate the boundary. Moreover, Ethiopia's reference to ‘the contested boundary, can only be understood as a reference to those parts of the boundary to which it alone and unilaterally takes exception: no part of the boundary is ‘contested’ by both Parties. ... Ethiopia characterizes the situation as being one in which ‘the work of the Commission is in terminal crisis’. The Commission does not accept that assessment: there is no ‘crisis’, terminal or otherwise, which cannot be cured by Ethiopia's compliance with its obligations under the Algiers Agreement, in particular its obligations to treat the Commission's delimitation determination as ‘final and binding’ (article 4.15) [emphasis ours] and ‘to cooperate with the Commission, its experts and other staff in all respects during the process of ... demarcation’ (article 4.14).”¹⁴

Unfortunately, the EEBC did not conclude its mandate the way it wanted to. Its several attempts to persuade Ethiopia to agree on physically demarcating on the ground failed. Despite the diplomatic niceties, the Commission did not hide the fact that it was Ethiopia that failed to cooperate. The Commission was frustrated and forced to conclude its mandate at the end of November 2007 by declaring the border virtually demarcated by the coordinates it had issued a year earlier. This was how the EEBC had put its frustration with Ethiopia in its 16th report to the United Nations:

“Ethiopia is not prepared to allow demarcation to continue in the manner laid down in the Demarcation Directions and in accordance with the timeline set by the Commission. It now insists on prior ‘dialogue’ but has rejected the opportunity for such ‘dialogue’ within the framework of the demarcation process provided by the Commission's proposal to meet with the Parties on 22 February. This is the latest in a series of obstructive actions taken since the summer of 2002 and belies the frequently professed acceptance by Ethiopia of the Delimitation Decision.”¹⁵

The Commission chose to end its mandate with the following scathing words to the Ethiopian foreign minister:

“Your letter seeks to blame the Commission for Ethiopia's failure to meet its obligations under the Algiers Agreement. Such blame is entirely misplaced. The truth of the matter appears to be that Ethiopia is dissatisfied with the substance of the Commission's

¹³ Meles Zenawi. Letter to the Security Council, September 19, 2003

¹⁴ Sir Elihu Lauterpacht. <http://dehai.org/demarcation-watch/articles/EEBC-Oct-7-2003-letter.pdf>

¹⁵ Sir Elihu Lauterpacht. <http://dehai.org/demarcation-watch/eebc/EEBC-President-Report-to-UN-16.pdf>

Delimitation Decision and has been seeking, ever since April 2002, to find ways of changing it. This is not an approach which the Commission was empowered to adopt and is not one to which the Commission can lend itself. I regret that it has been necessary to address you in such direct terms but your letter — and the publicity that you have given it — have left me with no alternative. It would be unacceptable for an international tribunal to be exposed to the kind of criticism which you have lodged without replying to it in necessary detail.”¹⁶

The U.S. government's reaction to Ethiopia's refusal to honor the EEBC decision was at best deceptive. While paying lip service to the EEBC decision in general terms, the U.S. government started to work against the letter and spirit of the Algiers Agreement, and to outright sabotage the decision's implementation. Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nation, John Bolton, recounts how a “U.S. initiative” to render the Algiers Agreement useless was being forwarded by the Department of State and pushed in the UN Security Council:

“For reasons I never understood, however, [Jendayi] Frazer [then Assistant Secretary for Africa] reversed course, and asked in early February [2005] **to reopen the 2002 EEBC decision, which she had concluded was wrong, and award a major piece of disputed territory to Ethiopia.** I was at a loss how to explain that to the Security Council, so I didn't.”¹⁷

The U.S., the African Union, the European Union and above all the United Nations, as guarantors and witnesses of the Algiers Agreement, have given a deaf ear to calls for implementing the EEBC decision, and have refrained from putting any pressure on Ethiopia to abide by the final and binding decision. Is this what the UN stands for? Is this an International Organization that thinks of Human Rights? From our side **we consider this deliberate conspiracy of silence as major human rights violations of the people of Eritrea.**

Occupation of Eritrean Territories and the Conspiracy of Silence

“Ethiopia's continued failure to comply with the Commission's Order of 17 July 2002 requiring Ethiopia forthwith to arrange for the return to Ethiopian territory of those persons in Dembe Mengul who were moved from Ethiopia pursuant to an Ethiopian resettlement programme since 13 April 2002 and to report to the Commission on the implementation of this order by 30 September 2002. ...”¹⁸

We strongly believe that the occupation of sovereign Eritrea territories and non-implementation of the final and binding decision of the Eritrea Ethiopia Boundary Commission is at the root of every trouble in the Horn of Africa and is a fundamental violation of the right of the Eritrean people. We are calling on The Special Rapporteur to acknowledge this for what it is and regard it as a hindrance to all efforts of promoting human rights in Eritrea. The international community needs to take all necessary *actions* to respect the *rights* of the Eritrean people to live in their own country in peace.

The belligerent stand of the Ethiopian Government and its declared goal of regime change in Eritrea including harboring and training various extremists and terrorist groups, and weaving all sorts of

¹⁶ Sir Elihu Lauterpacht. <http://dehai.org/demarcation-watch/eebc/EEBC-Letter-Ethiopia-Nov-27-2006.pdf>

¹⁷ John R. Bolton. *Surrender Is Not an Option*. Threshold Editions, 2007. p. 347-348

¹⁸ Sir Elihu Lauterpacht, <http://dehai.org/demarcation-watch/eebc/EEBC-Letter-Ethiopia-Nov-27-2006.pdf>

conspiracies to destabilize Eritrea are also violations of the *rights* of the people Eritrea. The first right of Eritreans is to secure their country from a neighbor that has yet to sincerely accept their independence, and continues to violate the territorial integrity and sovereignty of their nation. There is no right that is higher than this. Other false pretensions and accusations are off the mark.

Mass Expulsion of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean Origin

In 1998, immediately after Ethiopia's declaration of war against Eritrea on May 13, Ethiopia was on an unabated spree of ethnic cleansing. Ninety four percent of those deported by the end of the first month of the ethnic cleansing were people either born in Ethiopia or had been living in Ethiopia before Eritrea's independence.¹⁹ These violation of Human Rights and UN Failure to speak against them are detailed in the following five reports. ^{20,21,22,23,24} Where was the UN Human Rights Council at the time?

The world has witnessed mass expulsions prior to the Eritrean incident of 1998. The expulsion of Armenians from the Ottoman Empire, the expulsion of the Jews from Nazi Germany, the expulsion of Asians from Uganda, the expulsion of ethnic minorities from former Yugoslavia can be cited as examples. These expulsions are stark violations of human rights. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1967) was instituted to prevent gross violation of human rights such as these. However, even though Ethiopia acceded to the covenant (ICCPR) on June 11, 1993, it willfully and flagrantly subjected Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin to deportation. Anyone who had a drop of Eritrean blood was labeled a "security risk" and a candidate for deportation. In fact, the Late Ethiopian prime minister, in his trademark words of arrogance, declared that the Ethiopian government had the prerogative to deport people merely because it **"does not like the color of their eyes"**. These deportations were violations of human rights in the following sense:

- Forced Separation of Families: Breaching Article 9 and Article 23 of the ICCPR, Ethiopia pursued a deliberate strategy of separating children from their parents and of defiling the sanctity of the family as the natural and fundamental core unit of society. Married couples were separated from their spouses; the elderly were separated from their caregivers.
- Confiscation of Assets: Ethiopia violated the economic rights of the deported individuals. Large companies, trucks, hotels, farmlands, etc. were expropriated. Bank accounts of the expellees were syphoned and their pensions suspended. This was an illegal robbery by the State. The victims became destitute overnight. Eritrea was forced to shoulder undue burden of caring for the expellees.
- Arbitrary Arrests: The provision that everyone has the "right to liberty and security of person" was grossly abrogated. The deportees were subjected to "arbitrary arrests and detentions". No arrest-warranty was provided. The police arrested whomever they wanted and of their choosing.
- Inhuman and Degrading Treatment in Prison: The detainees were subjected to harsh treatment which included "lack of food, water and health care; overcrowding and solitary confinement".

¹⁹ Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC): A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE ERITREAN NATIONALS EXPELLED FROM ETHIOPIA DURING JUNE-JULY 1998: A *Synopsis of their Social Characteristics and Manners of Deportation, July 1998*

²⁰ Asmarom Legesse, The Uprooted: Case Material on Ethnic Eritrean Deportees from Ethiopia Concerning Human Rights Violations. Citizens for Peace in Eritrea, 26 July 1998 <http://www.denden.com/Conflict/deportees/legesse-072698.htm>

²¹ Natalie S. Klein, MASS EXPULSION FROM ETHIOPIA: Report on the Deportation of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin from Ethiopia, June – August, 1998 http://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story_id/MASS%20EXPULSION%20FROM%20ETHIOPIA%201.pdf

²² Craig Calhoun, Ethiopia's Ethnic Cleansing <http://www.denden.com/Conflict/deportees/calhoun-winter99.htm>

²³ Asmarom Legesse, The Uprooted II. A Scientific Survey of Ethnic Eritrean Deportees from Ethiopia Conducted with regard to Human Rights Violations. Citizens for Peace in Eritrea, February 1999. <http://www.dehai.org/conflict/uprooted/uprooted2.html>,

²⁴ Asmarom Legesse, The Uprooted Part III, Studies of Urban Eritreans Expelled from Ethiopia, Villagers Expelled from Tigrai and Communities in Eritrea displaced by Bombardment. Citizens for Peace in Eritrea, March 2000.

- Arduous Transportation to the Border: The farmers who were expelled from the northern part of Ethiopia were not provided with any means of transportation. They were instructed to walk towards the border. The majority of the deportees were transported by overcrowded buses and over extended period of time. They were deprived of adequate food and water. The entry points were equally challenging: hottest areas near the port of Assab or the flooded areas of the Setit River. Some were forced to walk through mine-infested battle zone in the middle of the night, while Ethiopian soldiers were firing over their heads.
- Violation of Diplomatic Immunity: According to Article 45 of the Vienna Convention, in the event “diplomatic relations are broken off between two States . . . the receiving State must, even in the case of armed conflict, respect and protect the premises of the mission, together with its property and archives.” Ethiopia disregarded this code of conduct It expelled the diplomatic staff, searched their bags, broke their suitcases, inspected the diplomatic pouch, imprisoned the civil servants, etc.
- Voluntary Repatriation of Ethiopians Residing in Eritrea: Eritrea did not take retaliatory measures against Ethiopians who were residing in Eritrea. When Ethiopia stopped using the port of Assab a good number of Ethiopians became unemployed. This economic difficulty induced Ethiopians to leave Eritrea on their own.
- Violation of Human Rights and UN Inaction: The deportation of thousands of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin was not a trivial matter. It was a crime of epic proportion. Nor was it committed in secrecy. It was flaunted before the very eyes of the UN. How come the UN Human Rights Council that is now crying “Human Rights abuse in Eritrea” under the duress of the US and Ethiopia did not take steps to stop this inhuman treatment? How come the UN is now nitpicking, attributing phantom crimes to Eritrea?

In addition to the death of over 130,000 poor southern Ethiopians that were used as Ethiopian human mine sweepers (in Amharic they called them as ‘fenji regatch”) and the 19,000 Eritrean youth that fell defending their country, Ethiopia brought the following destruction upon Eritrean farmers along the border area: 824,312 cattle, 1, 706, 320 sheep/goats, 109, 634 pack animals, 698,844 poultry were either killed or stolen. The estimated cost of 2,256,526,800 nakfa or (282,065,850 USD) ²⁵

Ethiopia was also on a wanton spree of destroying everything it thought would benefit Eritrea. Shops, hotels, small-scale industries worth 957,755,100 nakfa or 119,719,387.5 USD was destroyed²⁶. In addition Schools, Health Centers, Government Offices sustained damages worth 236,530,900 nakfa or 29,566,362.50 USD²⁷.

In addition to these the Ethiopian government on purpose destroyed several archeological sites, including the destruction of a stele at Matera, a stele that is thousands of years old. Ethiopia also dug up Eritrean fallen heroes’ cemeteries and scattered the remains around. These were all forms of human rights abuse; yet we didn’t hear a word from either Nigeria or Djibouti two of those who accused Eritrea of human rights abuse in Geneva and are now working as mouthpieces of the Ethiopia and U.S. governments. Where were they then? Aren’t all these violations of Human Rights and of Eritreans?

²⁵ University of Asmara Group, Livestock & Poultry Stolen/looted, Consequences of Ethiopia’s Invasion of Eritrea: A Preliminary Monetary Estimate of Destroyed and Looted Properties, July 2000. Table 9

²⁶ Ibid. Table 10

²⁷ Ibid. Table 12

UNJUST U.S. INSPIRED UN SANCTIONS

The unjust and undeserved sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council on Eritrea, and all the reckless and failed efforts to extend them to an economic sanction is also a violation of Eritrean people's rights and here too we ask The Special Rapporteur to acknowledge this for what it is. As the U.S. diplomatic cables leaked by *Wikileaks* clearly showed the sanctions were incubated in the U.S. and hatched in Ethiopia. In short they were the product of the collusion of the Governments of the United States and Ethiopia and all other actors who were covered or coerced into joining the chorus one by one. We present a sample here:

Eritrea was supposedly punished for helping Somalia insurgents with weapons, yet the UN's own report admits that:

*"Eighty percent of ammunition available at the Somali arms markets was supplied by TFG and Ethiopian troops, ...". The monitoring committee received details of some 25 military flights by Ethiopia into Somalia and knew that Ethiopian troops had brought military equipment into the country to arm 'friendly clans,' ...'Somalia is affected by a war economy, with great profits made by military commanders, who therefore have little incentive to change the status quo'. ... Kumalo said the Somalia sanctions committee backed the idea of independent investigations of Somalia's TFG, the Ethiopian government and AMISOM."*²⁸

Yet, Eritrea was the one that was punished for Ethiopian, African Union and Somali Transitional Federal Government violations. At the end even the Somalia-Eritrea Monitoring group, a group that has been used as a tool to punish Eritrea with sanctions, was finally forced to admit, in its 2012 report to the UN Security Council, that it

"[Somalia-Eritrea Monitoring Group] has found no evidence to substantiate allegations that Eritrea supplied Al-Shabaab with arms and ammunition by air in October and November 2011. No evidence to substantiate the allegations that one or more aircraft landed at Baidoa International Airport between 29 October and 3 November 2011, or that Eritrea supplied Al-Shabaab in Baidoa by air with arms and ammunition during the same period," and "no evidence of direct Eritrean involvement in the [Erta Ale European tourist attack] operation. Eritrea is currently a marginal actor in Somalia, with little, if any, influence, either positive or negative, on the course of events."

The arms embargo imposed on Eritrea is designed to deprive Eritrea from acquiring military equipment for its own defense. This is a deliberate maneuver designed to tip the balance of power in favor of Ethiopia and to encourage Ethiopia's belligerent posture. As always, Eritrea's ingenuity, tenacity and resilience cannot be discounted! However, it should be seen as a major violation of the Eritrean people's human rights. Yet the Special Rapporteur doesn't care to even mention it.

The issue of 2% rehabilitation and development tax

From another angle, *Eritreans are also being* intimidated and harassed by the unjust resolution, which negates our responsibility and active contribution, and participation in national development by paying the 2% tax as a contribution for the development of a nation which became free and independent through huge human sacrifices. It is to be noted that the UN and the AU have taken important initiatives

²⁸ South African Ambassador to the United Nations Dumisani Kumalo, May 22, 2008. <http://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/arms-reach-somali-warlords-despite-un-sanctions>

for the sole purpose of mobilizing the participation of the Diaspora in the development of their home country. Targeting only Eritrea and targeting the Eritrean Diaspora is a total violation of the human rights of the nation and its diaspora communities. The continuous harassment the Eritrean Diaspora is facing from Canada to Sweden, over this issue of remittance that is designed to help the Eritrean people stand on their own feet and embark on a sustainable path of development is also another gross violation of Eritrean people's right, yet the Special Rapporteur's report does care to look into it. The response of the Eritrean Diaspora to these unwarranted violations of their rights is:

"The love and loyalty Diaspora Eritreans have for their ancestral land is peerless. We want to make one point clear; the modest 2% Development and Rehabilitation contributions, the UN is targeting at the behest of those who do not wish Eritrea well is not about money. What they are after is the breaking the loyalty Diaspora Eritreans have for their people and country of origin. It is this unfettered loyalty they are trying to break. For Diaspora Eritreans, their country of origin and its people are priceless. Diaspora Eritreans know well that no amount of money they send back home matches the endurance and sacrifice the people inside Eritrea are making. The independence of Eritrea was not a gift of some treaty signed in European colonial capitals; it is the result of the precious gift brought by the priceless sacrifices of its precious sons and daughters. What these brave souls gave cannot be repaid by Diaspora Eritreans, or any living Eritrean for that matter. Their sacrifice is what allowed us to reclaim our identity and our cultural heritage. Though we are outside Eritrea, Eritrea has remained inside us. Eritrea has remained to become the fountain of our steadfastness and tenacity; our loyalty to our kinship is everlasting. No sanction will disrupt it."

Nevertheless we want to point out that the accusations for sanctions and the design to elevate the sanctions to include economic sanctions is also a scheme designed by the US and Ethiopia. For Res 20/20 to say "*violation by the Government of Eritrea of its international human rights obligations in connection with the collection of taxes outside Eritrea from its nationals*" is lifting off from Ethiopian and U.S. scripts. In short the move to impose sanctions in 2009 and the attempt to strengthen them further in 2011 were part of a scheme designed by the US and Ethiopian governments aimed at undermining weakening the Eritrean economic and socio-political situation. We present below in Annex 6 from the leaked US diplomatic cables as evidence on how this accusation was hatched.

Eritrea's wealth and prospects of the country, no matter how meager, are well managed and spent. There are no political elites or privileged classes in Eritrea. Eritrean laws protect the economic and social rights of all Eritrean citizens. Equitable access to educational, health services and food security has shown remarkable progress and significant achievements are being scored in laying the foundation to secure human rights and fundamental freedoms coupled with human dignity, human security and human development.

Government of Eritrea's Vision

The People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) is a grassroots, popular political organization (not a political party as it is portrayed by a few ill-intended elements). The PFDJ came into being at the 3rd congress of its predecessor EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front) in February 1994. At that congress the organization detailed its vision which had six pillars: National Harmony Political Democracy, Economic and Social Advancement, Social Justice, Cultural Renaissance, Regional and Global Cooperation. It further fleshed out what these six pillars are all about:

Eritrea's 1994 National Charter had a chapter on the PFDJ's vision. This section opens with these words:

Our vision is for Eritrea to become a country where peace, justice, democracy and prosperity prevail. Our vision is to eliminate hunger, poverty and illiteracy from Eritrea. Our vision is for Eritrea to preserve its identity and uniqueness, develop commitment to family and community care, and by advancing economically, educationally and technologically, find itself among the developed countries. Our vision is for Eritrean society to be known for harmony among its different sectors, gender equality, love of country, humanity, discipline, hard work and love for knowledge, respect for law and order, independence and inventiveness.²⁹

National Harmony is achieved by treating all citizens and ethnic groups equally and creating an environment in which no division is made on the basis of tribal origin, language, religious denomination, gender, social status and advance harmony, peace and stability. Here we can give examples of the tolerance that is prevalent in the country among the nine ethnic groups and various religious groups and how religious holidays are celebrated by all.

Political Democracy is achieved by seeking and securing proactive and active participation by all the citizens in electing their local and regional representatives and shaping the administrative policies while at the same time promoting the law-abiding and self-regulating nature of the people. Here we can cite as an example the elections that are being held from time to time in villages and towns and how people elect their representatives freely and democratically; how women in particular have been encouraged to play an active role etc..

Economic and Social Advancement is achieved by adopting and pursuing policies that are geared towards Eritrea's economic growth, provision and equitable distribution of social services, education, standards of living. Here we can also cite examples of the distribution of the colleges in the regional administrations; the infrastructure, schools, clinics, hospitals that have been and/or are being built in various parts of the country and not just in the capital city as it is the case in most developing countries.

Social Justice, also known as Economic and Social Democracy, can only be realized when and if the national wealth, services and opportunities are equitably distributed throughout the country and special attention is made to those highly disadvantaged part of the population. Examples cited above.

Cultural Renaissance is realized by identifying certain traditional values, comingling them with important ethical values adopted during the struggle for independence and thus having a common culture that is distinctly identified by and promotes the following features: patriotism, respect for others, gender equality, pursuit of the truth and justice, the rule of law, industriousness, self-confidence, self-reliance, open mindedness and innovation. Here we can mention the example of Sawa where students from the various regions come to attend the last year of High School there as part of the National Service of knowing Eritrea in its diversity and to prepare for the college entrance exam. We need to emphasize the role of Sawa in strengthening Eritrea's unity in diversity. Also we need to mention the annual Expo exhibition during which inventions by the young students are presented and the winners are given prizes by the President with a view to promote innovations.

²⁹ <http://www.meadna.com/assets/IMAGE%20NEWS/MEADNA%20NEWS%20IMAGES/national-charter.pdf>

Regional and Global Cooperation is achieved by pursuing a foreign policy with regards to its immediate neighbors, its region and globally based on mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and cooperation without compromising national interests and sovereignty. Eritrea has been steadily contributing towards the maintenance of peace, stability and security of its neighborhood and the region at large. On the other hand, Eritrea is one of the few countries that are current on their membership dues with AU and UN. This is just one example to show its commitment. Also, we can cite the example of our unconditional acceptance of the border verdict with Yemen, pursued peaceful relationship with Sudan, Djibouti etc.³⁰

Education for all and at all levels

Eritrea's vision for education is anchored with these words of the National Charter:

Education is the foundation of development. To provide equal educational opportunity means to provide equal opportunity for development. We must widely expand education so that our people can be free from ignorance, acquire knowledge and skills through various means, and enhance their productive capacity to build their country. Education is a fundamental right to which every Eritrean is entitled. Therefore, we must expand education to the rural areas, of the country where educational opportunity has so far been scant. We must build an advanced educational system which serves national unity and development, and equips people with knowledge and skills. Without the development of education, we cannot build our country or enhance democracy and justice.

Our greatest asset is our human resource. Therefore, we must assign a high priority to its development. Formal education is one way. In addition, all governmental and non-governmental institutions must provide continuing education and training. Continuous effort must be exerted to develop knowledge and skills throughout the society.³¹

To this end the country has been "striving to develop an educational system that is accessible to all, including the girl child in rural areas, and has the capacity to provide relevant, high quality and affordable education at all levels of the educational ladder, using an integrated approach to develop a sound education system."³² Indeed the growth of access to education in Eritrea since independence is praise worthy. The increase in enrollment in preschool is 530%, in elementary 186%, in middle school 461%, in secondary schools 246% and that in professional and technical schools 837%. The same can be said with the growth of the number of schools built after Eritrea's independence.

What is more encouraging is also how the growth is not only limited to the urban areas, but also the rural areas. For example at the time of independence in 1991/92 academic year, in the Southern Red Sea Region there were 1 preschool, 1 middle, 1 high school and 11 elementary schools now in the 2012/2013 academic year, there are 9 preschool, 42 elementary schools, 11 middle schools, and 2 secondary schools. Percentage wise this is 800%, 281.8%, 1000% and 100% growth in preschool, elementary, middle and high school in that order. Similarly the growth in enrollment in the respective

³⁰ <http://www.meadna.com/assets/IMAGE%20NEWS/MEADNA%20NEWS%20IMAGES/national-charter.pdf>

³¹ *ibid*

³² Eritrea's National Report submitted to the Human Rights Council, 26 November 2009 (A/HRC/WG.6/6/ERI/1) <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/172/22/PDF/G0917222.pdf>

levels was 603.6%, 150%, 298.6% and 169.8% in that order. The boarding school at Tio, and Afambo are prime examples on how Eritrea is trying to ensure education in the rural areas.³³

In the southern region the growth in the number of schools is in preschool from 15 to 127, in elementary from 61 to 242, in middle school from 19 to 87 and in high school from 6 to 26. This growth is 746.7%, 296.7%, 357.9%, 333.3% in that order. In the same region enrollment grew from 494 to 12,528 students in preschool, from 26,909 to 115, 659 in elementary, in middle school from 4,417 to 59, 128 and in high school from 3,909 to 32,543.

There is also lot of distortion and accusation vis-à-vis Eritrea's institutions of higher-education. The accusation goes: "The only University in Eritrea is closed" and replaced "by military administered colleges". This is a bold distortion of the facts.

At the time of Eritrea's independence there was no institution of higher education. The only institution that existed in Eritrea, the University of Asmara, was dismantled by the Ethiopian government and moved to Southern Ethiopia by the late 1980s. After independence the University was rehabilitated and was offering degree programs for a modest number of students. As the number of students leaving secondary school grew it became apparent that the University was not able to meet the higher Education need of the country. In 2004, Eritrea decided to create 8 full-fledged and independent colleges and move them to different parts of the country where they would have a better prospective for growth than the small space where University of Asmara was located in the middle of residential area of the capital city with no space to grow. So in place of 1 institute of higher learning, Eritrea, at a greater cost, has now 8 colleges accommodating the needs of 17,000 Eritrean youth and graduating around 3,000 students every year. By comparison the maximum the University of Asmara could handle was 5,000 students. In other words the college student enrollment in Eritrea has increased by 240%. What these 8 colleges are graduating per year, is also three to four-fold of what the University of Asmara was outputting. Here is how the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) put this process in its January 2013 report

"Eritrea has seen a change in its higher education system in the period 2004–2010. However, this reform is not a change in the system itself, but a change in the number of institutions offering higher education in the country. The system of diploma, bachelor (and master-) programmes has remained more or less the same, except for the fact that **the number of programs has increased.**

The University of Asmara has been the only institution of higher education in the whole country. All issues related to higher education have been concentrated around the university. **To be able to offer higher education to a larger number of students,** the government decided to close the University of Asmara, with no new intake of students after 2003. Then **they upgraded seven of the underlying colleges of the university to independent institutions of higher education.** Some of the new colleges have also been moved to other parts of the country, and one could say that there has been a decentralization of higher education in Eritrea. The result is that Eritrea today has seven institutions offering higher education, and the number of students attending programs of higher education has risen from around 5000 students at the University of Asmara in 2004 to around 17 000 students attending programs at the new colleges of higher education today.

³³ Eritrea Haddas News Paper, May 22, 2013.

The University of Asmara's main programme were the diploma programme and the bachelor degree; and was only able to introduce the master degree programme in 2004 just before closing. **Today we see that most of the new colleges of higher education have already introduced many new master degree programmes or are planning to introduce master degree programmes in the near future.**³⁴

This is the story. The University of Asmara building is now housing the College of Health Sciences (Asmara). This college is offering degree programs in 10 different areas. In additions the College is also offering masters programs in some areas. Asmara is also hosting another college: the Orotta School of Medicine and Dentistry. This college has been graduating an average of 33 medical doctors per year since 2009, lowering the population to doctor ratio in Eritrea by many folds.

The Eritrea Institute of Technology (Mai Nefhi) is granting first degrees in more than 14 different areas, including 8 in engineering fields ranging from civil to aeronautical as well as bachelors and masters degree in the basic sciences: biology, chemistry, mathematics, and physics. The College of Education, which is also housed near the EIT, is offering degree programs that prepare elementary and secondary school teachers in different areas.

The College of Arts and Social Science (Adi Qeyih) is offering degrees in 7 areas; the Hamelmallo Agricultural College (Hamelmallo) has degree programs in 7 fields, the College of Business and Economics (Halhale) in 8 areas, and the College of Marine Science and Technology (Massawa) another 5 degree programs. In short, these 8 colleges together are offering more than 38 degree programs. In addition together they have 55 diploma programs that students could complete in two-three years.³⁵

Eritrea has allocated a huge budget for education. It is also spending tens of millions of dollars to bring foreign professors (most of them Indians) to staff the newly established colleges until its internal capacity can meet the growing needs of the sector. The modern buildings at the Eritrean College of Social Science at Adi Keyih and College of Marine Sciences in Massawa were built at a cost of tens of millions of dollars. This is a small glimpse of where Eritrea's priorities are, especially when it comes to the empowerment of its youth.

- Starting 2008 Eritrea also has a postgraduate medical education with the objectives of training Eritrean physician specialists in Surgery, Pediatrics, Ob/Gyn; and to establish similar programs in Internal Medicine, ENT, Ophthalmology and other specialties. To minimize brain-drain by creating meaningful professional and personal opportunities.

"Between January 2008 and December 2012, a total of 25 specialists (15 Pediatricians, 5 Surgeons and 5 Ob/Gyn specialists) have successfully completed their residency training (verified by external examiners) and handed over to the MOH for deployment. It is apparent that the new specialists are providing quality services, not only in Asmara, but also in a number of zoba hospitals."³⁶

³⁴ Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT)
http://www.nokut.no/Documents/NOKUT/Artikkelbibliotek/Kunnskapsbasen/Rapporter/UA%202013/Gulliksen_Anne-Kari_Audensen_Erik_Report_on_recognition_of_higher_education_in_Eritrea_and_Ethiopia_2013-1.pdf

³⁵ National Board for Higher Education, Statistical Report 2009/2010.

³⁶ Orotta School of Medicine, Postgraduate Medical Education Program Progress Report: 2008-2012, March 2013.

This is significant; for example before the start of the program Eritrea had only 5 pediatricians, all of them working at Orotta Pediatric Hospital in Asmara. Now the number has quadrupled and children in other parts of the country have now access to specialist care.

This is why we said there is a distortion and misrepresentation of facts. The allegation that the colleges are administered by the military is without any basis. That there is no military administration in any of these colleges is something anyone can verify.

Equitable Health Services

The *multi-faceted* interventions to promote health security, environmental sustainability despite limitations of resources are also remarkable.

As the result of the concerted efforts the government of Eritrea put, the “trends in both HIV and AIDS cases in Eritrea are favorable, suggesting a reversal and stabilization of HIV infection in the general population, with a prevalence of less than one percent in 2010. **Eritrea is polio free and has virtually eliminated neonatal tetanus. Measles is well under control.**” Eritrea was awarded by GAVI for ‘best performance in immunization with high and sustained levels of immunization coverage’. Although much remains to be done, our malaria control program has been globally sited as one of the most aggressive and successful programs in the developing world.”³⁷

Since independence, Eritrea has seen an “unprecedented reduction in infant mortality from 81 per 1,000 live births in 1991 to 42 per 1,000 live births in 2010 and in under-five mortality rate from 148 per 1,000 live births in 1991 to 63 per 1,000 live births in 2010. The maternal mortality ratio has decreased from 998 per 100,000 live births in 1995 to 486 in 2010.”³⁸

Eritrea is also one of the three African countries that are on track in both MDG4 (Child Health) and MDG5 (Maternal Health).

In the years from 1991 to 2010, the number of hospitals in Eritrea nearly doubled, the number of health centers grew by ten-fold; the number health stations more than tripled. In addition each Region of Eritrea has now a modern referral hospital.

In the first 20 years of independence access to health care within 10 Km radius, increased from 46% in 1991 to over 75% in 2010 and around 60% of the population live within 5 Kms from a health facility.

Since independence, in 1991, the different health schools in Eritrea had trained a total of 5,404 health professionals. “By “2009 the school has graduated 1,353 health professionals in 16 categories of health profession. Hence, its capacity has increased by more than four fold from about 250 in 1992 to around 1,350 students in 2009.”³⁹

“Within nine years of its existence, the Orotta School of Medicine has succeeded in training 176 doctors while the Orotta School of Dental Medicine shall graduate 24 dentists in 2014. At present, there are 311 medical and 80 dental students pursuing their education.”⁴⁰

The Orotta School of Medicine began its educational program with its first intake of 32 medical students; 6 females and 26 males on 16th February 2004. The students are being trained using internationally

³⁷ Eritrea Ministry of Health. Two Decades (1991-2011) on the Road to Health for all, March 2011.

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ Andemariam Gebremichael, Eritrea's Science is Alive and Kicking, December 2012. http://orotta.org/Nature_article_Eritrea.pdf

recognized standards. The Orotta School of Medicine was set up to work in close association with the newly established Orotta Medical Surgical Hospital and the renovated and expanded Orotta Pediatric and Maternity Hospitals in Asmara. With a continuous intake in the past eight years, the total number of medical and dentistry students has increased by more than ten fold, from 32 in 2004 to 311 in 2012. The number of faculty has also increased accordingly.

According to data available from 2011 doctor to population ratio has increased by more than 100 percent from 1:37,500 in 1991 to 1:13:000 at the moment, while nurse to population ratio has also increased by more than 100 percent from 1:9,500 in 1991 to 1 in 3,400 at the moment. The WHO recommended figure for doctor to population and nurse to population ratio is at least 1:10,000 and 1:5000 respectively. Considering the total number of doctors that are graduating in the country since 2009, it will not take long before Eritrea exceeds the WHO recommended minimum figure.

In 1999, at the time the rollback malaria strategy was launched in Eritrea, malaria ranked the first as a cause of morbidity and mortality in the country. Since 1999, the Government launched implementation of its strategic plan with the objective of reducing malaria morbidity and mortality by 80 percent within five years.

Access to safe water improved significantly in Eritrea between 1991 and 2010. Almost 75 per cent of urban residents and 57 per cent of rural residents now have access to clean drinking water, according to the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) for Water and Sanitation. The national average needed to reach, or to be on track to reach, MDG 7 for access to clean drinking water is 72 per cent. Thus the Joint Monitoring Program estimates that Eritrea is on-track for meeting the MDG target for access to safe water by 2015. This achievement undoubtedly played an important role in the improved child health indicators discussed earlier.

In Eritrea health care, equity is the call for universal coverage of the population, with care provided according to need. In principle no one should be left out, no matter how poor or how remote. If all cannot be served, those most in need should have priority. The motto in Eritrea is “**health for all and in all**”.

Food Security

Eritrea has abandoned food aid programs and is *laser-focused* on ensuring food security and has shown remarkable growth. This is designed to ensure the people of Eritrea to live in dignity. Unless a population is free of a perpetual dependency, it cannot chart its own future.

For the past several years, the Government was engaged in food security activities, and has openly and clearly expressed its strong commitment to National Food Security as its number one national priority. As part of this effort the country is becoming a nation of dams, along other irrigation and agro-industrial development projects aimed at food security.

Infrastructure Development

Between 1992 and 2010 the government had constructed and rehabilitated a total of 1,300 km network of asphalted roads at a cost of 2.005 billion nakfa. Another 3,800 km of gravel roads at a cost of 1.711 billion nakfa. In addition 10,000 km earth roads were constructed with over 479 million nakfa.

New runways at a total cost of 465 million nakfa have been built for the Asmara and two additional international airports.

The Tokor Dam that supplies Asmara was built at a cost of 500 million nakfa and in addition 16 dams holding a total of 93.07 million cubic meters were built at the cost of 1.2597 billion nakfa.

It has to be noted that ninety-one per cent (91%) of the above-mentioned domestic contractors completed projects. The total expenditure Eritrea incurred to build roads and dams, in 2010 currency estimate is over 10.568 billion nakfa.

Religious Harmony

More than anything else, Eritreans have managed to forge a national harmony that is the envy of everyone in the neighborhood. As some of Eritrea's neighbors are engaged in ethnic cleansing or burn each other over stolen elections, Eritreans are a cohesive unit without any peer in the area. Though the population is divided equally between Christians and Muslims, Eritreans are known for eating, praying and living together. Their motto during the ill-fated British attempt to divide them along ethnic and religious lines was "United we shall live", it remains the same today. The common echoed motto today is "Nine people in one accord". Eritreans are tolerant to each other's religious beliefs and had remained so for thousands of years.

ERITREAN WOMEN: "EQUALITY THROUGH EQUAL PARTICIPATION"

The Preamble to the Eritrean Constitution reads: "...Noting the fact that Eritrean women's heroic participation in the struggle for independence and solidarity based on equality and mutual respect generated by such struggle will serve as an unshakable foundation for our commitment and struggle to create a society in which women and men will interact on the basis of mutual respect, fraternity and equality..."

Much has been said and written about Eritrean women, by researchers who relied on anecdotal data, hearsay, and sometimes out right distortions with the hopes of creating narratives that fit pre-conceived biases about Eritrea, its leadership and its people. None has yet captured fully the essence of being an Eritrean woman. In fairness to all non-Eritreans who have attempted to present an accurate portrayal of the Eritrean woman, we concede that it is an impossible task. Eritrean women are not homogenous; they come from varied backgrounds, ethnic groups, economic groups, varying education, and experience in pre-independence and post-independence Eritrea.

The history of the Eritrean woman is the history of Eritrea-the long and bitter struggle for independence, the violence and destruction of war, and the determination, perseverance, resilience and sacrifice of a people. It is a history that has yet to be written in full and the issues relating to Eritrean women today should be understood in that context. The story has yet to be written in full. Neither A/HRC/RES/20/20 of 6 July 2012 nor A/HRC/RES/21/1 of 26 September 2012 accurately depicts the state of the Eritrean woman. It is an insult to the brave women of Eritrea who have worked to educate the society and bring an end to discriminatory traditional practices, and be lectured on such matters by those who are working to reverse their progress.

Women and the War for the liberation of Eritrea

For brevity's sake, a full and comprehensive look at Eritrea's over 100-year long history cannot be presented in this paper. Nor will this section attempt to address the 30-year, 1961-1991, struggle for Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia.

Suffice it to mention that the thirty-year war of liberation caused decades of lost opportunities for development, as well as the destruction of economic and social infrastructures. Eritrean women, like most women in countries at war, bore the brunt of the violence and were saddled with extraordinary responsibilities as their brothers, husbands, fathers and sons who left in droves to join the fight to liberate Eritrea.

Sondra Hale, an anthropologist at the University of California, whose research interests are in gender politics, social movements, and cultural studies, is one of the few that have researched and written about Eritrean women. In her 2001 paper, "The State of the Women's Movement in Eritrea"⁴¹, Hale wrote the following:

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"...In the pantheon of women's successful participation in liberation movements, Eritreans would rank near the top. Many of us who research women and social movements have been watching Eritrean women very closely...women participated in one of the most protracted conflicts in the twentieth century and in an even deadlier second war spilling over into the twenty-first century... Eritrean society—half Christian, half Muslim—is highly conservative with regard to the cultural positioning of women... during the first liberation war (30 years), the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) developed one of the most enlightened views of women that we have seen anywhere in the world... Women participated fully—not as substitutes but as full-fledged citizens of revolutionary Eritrea—eventually comprising more than 30 percent of the fighting force and serving in all capacities; this is not the usual history of militaries, where women have more commonly been used selectively and mostly in jobs seen as extensions of their domestic labor..."

Eritrean women were not casual observers in the war; they were pioneers for women's rights. The rights, privileges and responsibilities that Eritrea's women enjoy today were not given; they were earned. From the early 1970s, tens of thousands of women from every ethnic group in Eritrea joined the liberation movements. An increase in Ethiopian atrocities against women and children resulted in the thousands leaving to join the liberation movement, contributing immeasurably not just to the liberation struggle, but also to the women's emancipation movement worldwide.

■ The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) emphasized the equality of women and importance of their participation as equals. In the EPLF's 3rd Congress of 1994, extremely important resolutions such as Resolution XI, on were passed in reference to women's rights. Resolution XI -on enhancing social position of women states:

"...The congress reaffirms its categorical rejection of all ideas and practices that oppress women and detract from...The Congress resolves to struggle to draw up and implement programs to enable women to consolidate their political and social status, guarantee their economic freedom by enhancing their role in production and broaden their access to education and training so that they may become self-sufficient and maximize their contribution..."

Eritrean women were integrated into the ranks of the freedom fighters and fought alongside the men on the front lines. They made up 30 percent of the country's combat forces. The EPLF treated women as equals, and they served as platoon commanders, commandos, assault troops, tank and truck drivers, mechanics, doctors, tank drivers etc. Women also served in many non-combat capacities as teachers, paramedics, political organizers, technicians, garage mechanics, drivers and more. Eritrean women in villages across Eritrea and in the vast Eritrean Diaspora organized to support the liberation movement.

The Liberation War and the establishment of the NUEW

In Eritrea, the mandate to oversee the promotion of gender equality and mainstreaming and the empowerment of women rests with the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW). Established in 1979

⁴¹ Northeast African Studies , vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 155-177, 2001

during the liberation war, to mobilize women to fight for Eritrea's liberation, it simultaneously worked to fight against harmful and discriminatory customs and traditions. Through this organization, women's participation in the armed struggle for independence was enhanced and a solid foundation of equal opportunity & participation of women in all walks of life was laid.

NUEW's mission is to ensure that all Eritrean women confidently stand for their rights and equally participate in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres of the country and share in the benefits. It also implemented programs in basic health care, literacy, and training to serve the needs of Eritrean women. Women were a significant proportion of the assembly members elected in EPLF-administered areas.

Sondra Hale wrote:

"...The National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW, or HAMADE) was a highly developed women's organization that was instrumental in crafting a women's agenda during the military struggle and was poised to play a leading role upon liberation...Women experienced a high degree of emancipation while "in the field"—obtaining an education—including political education—learning new skills, coming into a new sociopolitical identity..."

- Currently, the NUEW has over 200,000 members and has branches at the 21 regional, sub-regional and community levels throughout Eritrea. Its membership also extends within the Eritrean Diaspora where the NUEW has 58 branch offices in 18 countries around the world. There are over 26 chapters in the United States of America. The NUEW is an effective organization with widespread, solid grass-roots presence. Moreover, the wide-range of projects and activities carried out over the years by the NUEW, benefiting tens of thousands of mainly poor rural women, have contributed to the credibility and trust it enjoys among Eritrean society.
- Nation-building is a difficult task under the best of circumstances, but even more difficult for a new nation in a very difficult and volatile Horn region surrounded by hostile neighbors. The war for Eritrea's independence cost 65,000 of its best and finest. The humanitarian toll was enormous with 10,000 of injured war veterans, 40,000 civilians were killed and over 90,000 orphaned children became orphans. Thousands of women became the sole breadwinners. The economy Eritrea inherited at independence was in shambles. The economic infrastructures were non-existent. Thirty years of war brought dire consequences for the people of Eritrea. The most obvious indicators of the destruction caused by three decades of conflict and its effects on the entire population was the displacement of thousands of Eritreans from their homes and villages, thousands of Eritreans became the victims of forced migration and local economies were shattered. The national economy was equally devastated.

Referendum and the Making of a Constitution

On 7 April 1992, the Provisional Government of Eritrea issued Proclamation No.22/1992, which established the Referendum Commission of Eritrea (RCE) and mandated it with organization, conduct, and supervision of the referendum. The Eritrean referendum for independence was a watershed in modern Eritrea's history. Eritreans queued in disciplined lines with registration cards in hand at the 1,010 polling stations in an atmosphere charged with festive excitement. The capital city, towns and villages were decorated with hundreds of green, red, and blue EPLF flags and the UN flag of olive branches on a background of sky blue⁴².

⁴²The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism, 1941–1993 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

- Organizational, the occasion was a carefully planned event which demonstrated the PGE/EPLFs efficiency, pragmatism and high degree of popular legitimacy. The National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) participated in voter education as it had direct links to the people. All eligible voters were registered by mid-December. From December to April civic education about voting procedures was conducted in all regions using the local languages. The Referendum Commissions' efforts to educate the population proved to be successful despite the fact that the majority of the population had no prior experience of voting. The 99.8 % vote for independence announced on April 27, 1993 dispelled any doubts about the wishes of the population.
- The work of the Constitution Commission was guided by a 10-member Executive Committee, and its members represented a cross-section of Eritrean society, including 21 out of 48, or 44% were women. In addition, 15 out of 46 members of the Traditional Laws Advisory Committee members were women. Each of Eritrea's nine ethnic groups was also represented, as were the business and professional communities.
- The Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) made a deliberate effort to ensure women's participation in every stage of the constitution-making process. Hence, fifty percent of the members of the Constitution Commission were female, effectively taking part throughout the process. Eritrean women had the opportunity to make their voice heard and advocate for their rights and concerns through their participation in various consultation forums held inside the country and in the Diaspora.
- The Eritrean Constitution made it clear under Article 7 paragraph 1 that:
 - "...It is a fundamental principle of the State of Eritrea to guarantee its citizens broad and active participation in all political, economic, social and cultural life of the country..."
- In addition to this, the National Charter,⁴³ the ideological guideline and principal document of The People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), magnifies the issue of women as a major social issue and explicitly states:

"...A society that does not respect the rights and equality of women cannot be a truly liberated society. During the years of struggle, big changes occurred for Eritrean women. Seen as weak and passive creatures, of less value than man, the Eritrean woman transformed herself into a formidable fighter when her erstwhile-suppressed strength was allowed to express itself. Our revolution would not have succeeded without their participation..."

- Despite the traditional barriers the role of women in the society and nation-building was further acknowledged, the Peoples Front for Justice and Democracy (PFDJ) Charter states:

"...the role of women in society and in the family should be given greater recognition. Eritrea cannot modernize without the full participation of women...Eritrea must be a country where both genders live in equality, harmony and prosperity..."

- These are the basic principles and ideological belief upon which the rights of Eritrean women are founded and embedded. From the constitution, to the various laws and regulations to sector policies, the legal and policy environment in Eritrea is favorable to gender equity and the empowerment of women. All discriminatory clauses and connotations were removed, and protective legal measures put in place. Suffice it to mention some of the amendments pertaining to the status of women are:

⁴³ National charter for Eritrea, approved third congress EPLF, 1994

- Marriage is now based on the free consent of both partners, and needs no parental consent.
- The legal age for marriage was raised to 18 years from 15; Women can enter into marriage freely and are afforded equal rights as men;. Bride price and abduction are prohibited by law;

Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Barely four years since attaining independence and despite all other challenges that required attention and resources from the state, believing in the importance of women in Eritrean society, and the government's desire to defend the rights of the Eritrean woman, the State of Eritrea ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995. The Convention has been translated into all the local languages and has been widely disseminated, particularly among women. There is strong commitment and political will on the part of the government, which provides a supportive environment for the implementation of the Convention.

The 2004 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) is another key national planning document that addresses the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment. Through direct affirmative action and other measures, the PRSP aims to enhance women's participation in the political, economic and social spheres, and pledges to make women both active participants in and target beneficiaries of the poverty reduction activities outlined in the strategy. It further specifies measures to improve women's access to employment openings in both the public and private sectors, as well as to enhance their opportunities to access land, financial credit and skills-training services.

The PRSP also specifies policies aimed at the social protection of women, besides other disadvantaged groups of society, through measures that include direct support and social security. Women's economic issues have also been adequately addressed in a newly developed national food security strategy that was prepared in tandem with the PRSP

▪ Eritrean Women as Decision Makers

Proclamation No.86/1996 on the establishment of Local Government stipulates that 30% of the seats in the Regional Assemblies would be reserved for women and that they would also contest the remaining 70%. Article 14 of the constitution prohibits all forms of discrimination based on race, ethnic origins, language, color, gender, religion, disability, age, political view, or social or economic status or any other improper factors.

To further ensure women's equal access to all available services, and to have full participation in power and decision-making, several women are appointed to higher positions. Currently there are four women Ministers holding the position of Justice Minister, Minister of Health, Minister of Labor & Human Welfare, and Minister of Tourism. In addition, there are some High Court judges, attorneys, Zoba (neighborhood)Regional governors as well as director-generals, directors and unit heads in ministries and other governmental departments.

Promoting women's participation in public life – encouraging and supporting them to run for elected office, get organized, and seek meaningful representation in all branches of power – is the official policy in Eritrea.

Eritrean women in the Diaspora play important roles as mothers, caregivers, professionals and community activists. Many have taken advantage of the educational and professional opportunities and today Eritrean women work as small business owners, architects, engineers, teachers and professors, medical providers, lawyers and they are active leaders in communities around the world.

Land Ownership in Eritrea

All land in Eritrea is state-owned. New amendments were instituted to the Civil Code that fundamentally altered the status of women in Eritrea. Women are now granted the legal right to own and inherit land and housing and married partners have equal rights within the family to land, housing and property. Eritrea introduced the Land Proclamation which granted **ALL** Eritrean citizens lifetime usufruct rights to land, rights which can be inherited. Nowhere in the Proclamation is any distinction made between men and women; Eritrean law now has eliminated all traces of customary practices that give privileges to men over women

Education

Considerable achievements were made by the EPLF during the liberation struggle in terms of providing education for girls and women for the first time in historically disadvantaged areas, developing and testing a new curriculum in the Revolution School, and more generally creating a cadre of skilled women to act as role models for others inside and outside the Front, and to give the general population an insight into alternative gender roles

“...Equality of access to and attainment of, educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change... Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic returns, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development, and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable...” (Para.69 The Beijing Platform for Action).

Women's Health

HAMSET (a program to combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria, STDs and Tuberculosis) is a major initiative coordinated by the Ministry of Health that aimed at tackling the main causes of the such diseases, with the support and coordination of efforts of several ministries, the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS), and other communities. Women & children were the prime beneficiaries of The HAMSET project

Eritrea, who once had the highest maternal mortality rates in the world (about 1400 deaths per 100,000 births) in the past, is today , it is one of the four African countries on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goal 5 on Maternal Health. Goal 5 calls on countries to reduce maternal mortality rate by three quarters by 2015. For Eritrea, this will mean attaining a rate of less than 350 deaths per 100,000 births.

High incidence of obstructed labor contributed to the high maternal mortality rate in Eritrea. The rural nature of Eritrea, with its poor communication and transportation infrastructure, particularly in outlying areas, required that 80 percent of deliveries took place without a physician or trained midwife present.

The commitment and persistent efforts of the Government of the State of Eritrea, in partnership with other stakeholders, has resulted in an impressive progress in maternal and child health. Today in Eritrea, each community has fully-trained maternal care-givers and expectant mothers living far from medical centers do not have to risk their lives travelling long distances while in labor. Instead, trained birth attendants visit them in their homes before and after delivery to provide medical assistance and to ensure that both mother and baby are in good health

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

- Female Genital Mutilation is a harmful traditional practice that affects girls and women in at least 27 out of 46 African countries. It is also found in some parts of the Arabian Peninsula (i.e. Yemen and Oman) and also in certain parts of the Far East. The emigrants from these areas to countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States and Europe, carry this practice with them to their host countries, thus making FGM effects a worldwide menace.
- The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW), adopted by the UN on 20 December 1993, Resolution 48/104, makes it clear to protect the rights of women. It defines FGM as violence against women (Article 2). Eritrea is a signatory of this UN Convention and in 2007 it outlawed FGM.
- The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), which led the fight for independence and became the government in 1991, has worked since 1988 to eradicate this practice. Thirty percent of the fighting force during the struggle for independence was composed of women. These women have been vocal in articulating their views that women sacrificed during the fighting, not to re-establish traditions harmful to women, but to protect the status of women within society.
- The government has enlisted the leaders of Eritrea's largest religious groups in its campaign against this practice. Because most of those who practice FGM/FGC believe it is a religious requirement, Muslim and Christian leaders explain that it is not a part of either religion.
- The National Union of Eritrean Women continues to teach about the harmful health effects of the practice. This project compliments the campaign of the Ministry of Health. The National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students also conducts anti-FGM/FGC campaigns among the young people. In 2007, the Government of Eritrea passed a proclamation banning FGM/C. An intensive, multi-faceted advocacy and mobilization campaign ensued, aiming to change attitudes among different groups of society – including traditional birth attendants, circumcisers, community elders and religious leaders.
- So the Human Right Council's concerns are misplaced and its assertion about FGM in its Resolution is out of synch with the realities in Eritrea. Eritrea is not one that needs lectures on defending the rights of its citizens-least of all the women of Eritrea-who may be poor, but are not intellectually inferior, or lacking in wisdom and compassion. The women of Eritrea can teach others a thing or two about defending human rights to those who presume to lecture them on what their rights should be.

Attitudes cannot be legislated

- There are many factors that have contributed to the economic status of Eritrean women; none have to do with the Government of Eritrea's policies or practice.
- The effect of the long lasting war and drought complemented with the traditional patriarchal attitude, the existence of norms and values in society, firmly anchored in social-cultural contexts determines gender roles and responsibilities
- Post-independence war torn economy
- Humanitarian toll on the country-women became sole heads of some households, care-givers, and wage earners. Over 40% of the Eritrean population is female-headed families
- Marriage and child birth
- Men sought to reassert their authority once they were freed from preoccupation with war. Although they regarded women's participation in the liberation war as a necessity during the conflict, some considered it inappropriate in the post-Independence era, succumbing to societal pressures.

- Latent traditional attitudes and customs that re-surfaced- difficult for some to accept the changing, expanding roles of the Eritrean woman
- The psychological stress of war can generate nostalgia for the traditional social and political order, with marginal roles in public life and that can influence the behavior of some ex-fighters.
- War fatigue gripped some women in Eritrea and in the Diaspora and has contributed to their decisions to leave public life. Women who had shouldered heavy public burdens in addition to their familial responsibilities were understandably physically and emotionally exhausted by the end of the liberation war.
- From 1998-2000, Eritrea-Ethiopia border conflict cost the lives of 19,000 Eritreans, and disproportionately affected Eritrean women who were once again forced to fight to defend their nation, but also care for their families.
- Legislative frameworks for protecting the rights of women and inheritance of land and land-based resources in most cases, are overridden by entrenched discriminatory social practice, and need socially and legally recognizable and enforceable mechanism.

Limited institutional capacity, complicated procedures for business start-ups, collateral requirements, and limited mobility for networking and limited access to information, technology and financial services make it harder for participation.

- Discouragement of females from traditional plowing. The Government of Eritrea has introduced modern agricultural-equipment, such as tractor services, that are changing the farming system, and the norms that inhibit women from oxen plowing. Lack of labor and capital (oxen and tools) push women to enter in crop sharing arrangement

Time constraints affect women disproportionately due to home making and as a result, women have to trade off among necessary or important tasks, including developing or expanding their own skills/businesses, as well as employees.

The Government and people of Eritrea believe that long-term, sustainable development can be achieved when men and women are given equal opportunity to rise to their potential and participate in the social, economic and political development of the nation. **The women of Eritrea in the Diaspora call on the UN Human Rights Council to respect the rights of the Eritrean people, allow the full participation of Eritrean women in international and regional forums, and call on the immediate removal of all economic and other sanctions against the State of Eritrea and its people.**

EMPOWERMENT OF THE YOUTH

- It would have been better for The Special Rapporteur to witness the developments in Eritrea by yourself. But The Special Rapporteur must understand that she was appointed as a Special Rapporteur over the objection of Eritrea and her reckless statements and shady connections didn't help. This is unprecedented. The resolution was tabled by Ethiopia and Djibouti who blocked Eritrea's participation in IGAD, which is also unprecedented. We were happy to see Eritrea's active participation in the Human Rights Commission. A one-sided report will likely lead to Eritrea completely withdrawing from the Commission, which seems to be Ethiopia and Djibouti's goal. Had she had an iota of credibility she would have listened more than talking. Her report should have strived to improve human rights in Eritrea, instead of being used by Eritrea's enemies to beat war drums. The Special Rapporteur had a chance to be an impartial Rapporteur, but for reasons unknown to us, she has already taken the side of Eritrea's historic enemies. This is worrisome.

Just as the freedom fighters in the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) during the struggle for Eritrea's independence, members of the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) in post-independence Eritrea concurrently fulfill military and nonmilitary functions. As noted in books written about the EPLF, the Front has:

"... accomplished extraordinary things with meager resources. Despite the continuing absence of sustained external support, the Front steadily improved its military capacity, while simultaneously building basic infrastructure (construction, transportation, communications), promoting economic development (agriculture, animal husbandry, commerce and trade), delivering social services (education, health, emergency relief), and campaigning to alter fundamental power relations within rural society (land reform, marriage reform, restructuring of village administration)..."

- Everyone in Eritrea is mobilized for nation building...but not everybody is a member of the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF).
- Building Eritrea's military capability was never the sole objective of the Eritrean National Service Program. In 1995, 4 years into Eritrea's independence, and a 2 years after the referendum, it was not military capacity that consumed the minds of Eritreans; rather it was the daunting task of nation-building. The 1995 Proclamation of National Service lists as its main objective as being the creation of a new generation characterized by love of work and discipline, and to foster national unity and equal participation of the people in the development of Eritrea's economy.
- Eritrea's basic infrastructural needs, such as roads, electricity, food production, health and education are even more urgent today. Members of the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) are not only a protective military force but they are also playing a major role in nation-building endeavors. With other members of the Eritrean society, they are fighting poverty, food insecurity, illiteracy, and backwardness. If there was ever a need for further evidence to suggest that the military can contribute positively to economic development...then Eritrea is a living example.

The Warsai-Yikealo Program (WYP) has been introduced in Eritrea with an objective of constructing and reconstructing the infrastructure of the country. It was a program that would enhance both the participation of the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) in development of the country and increase Eritrea's human resource capacity, as more and more members of the EDF acquire new technical knowledge and other skills.

The youth training center in Sawa has been vilified, maligned and undermined since its inception. Eritrean values and work ethics have been equally demonized and misrepresented. Is Eritrea the only country that has some kind of national service program? Would these seminar-room activists label countries such as Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Israel, Norway, and Switzerland as being "militaristic" just because they have some sort of mandatory military service program?

- Today, seven out of the 26 NATO members Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Norway, and Turkey, still run their armies with conscripts. Are these states "undemocratic"?

Non-pecuniary motivations such as love of people and service to country, self-reliance, dignity and self esteem, sense of responsibility and accountability, to look beyond the present and put national needs and interests ahead of their own personal needs, a sense of self-worth, sense of belonging, producing noticeable, measurable results in the lives of the Eritrean people etc. etc. long cherished Eritrean values cultivated and enhanced during the long 30-year bitter struggle for Eritrea's independence, remain the

driving force and guiding principles today, as they did then. It is being able to contribute to the development of Eritrea that makes their sacrifices worthwhile.

The Majority of those who leave Eritrea illegally, across the border regret their decision, the minute they step on the other side. Eritrean youth in disease infested, squalor “refugee camps” of Ethiopia, or abandoned in the vast Saharan desert, or in the shark infested seas, or in the urine infested train and subway stations in Europe, or in detention centers in Cairo, Tel Aviv, Houston and elsewhere, are fast realizing that the grass is not greener on the other side. Youth that were the pride of the nation, who had the opportunity to produce miracles in Eritrea, find themselves praying for miracles to save their lives.

- Eritrea has granted amnesty to Eritrean youth and despite the massive propaganda launched to prevent them from returning to Eritrea, many have taken advantage of the amnesty proclamation and returned to their homes and families, and some to their units. Yes, members of the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) are shouldering multiple responsibilities today, and yes they are undertaking major development projects around the country, building Eritrea's infrastructures whilst defending Eritrea's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and yes all members of Eritrean society are participating in the nation-building endeavors...if that constitutes “militarization”, then so be it. As any other nation, Eritrea has to defend its sovereignty. It is priceless. If it is impossible to tell military personnel from civilians, it is because everyone in Eritrea is mobilized for nation-building

If the UN is concerned about the long National Service in Eritrea, it ought to enforce international law and urge the minority regime in Ethiopia to vacate from sovereign Eritrean territories it has occupied since 13 April 2002 when the Eritrea Ethiopia Boundary Commission delivered its final and binding delimitation decision. Prolonging the occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories is directly linked to the prolonged National Service of Eritrea's youth. Those who failed to uphold the rule of law and shoulder their moral and legal obligations as guarantors and witnesses of the Algiers Agreements signed between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 2000 do not have the moral authority to talk about the plight of Eritrea's youth.

- Finally, the accusation made by those who want to justify the illegal movement of youth across Eritrea's borders is that Eritrea has a “shoot to kill” policy for all those who try to leave. Whilst the statement is categorically false and baseless, it behooves the spinners to try and cross the US-Mexican or US-Canadian border illegally and see if they can do that whilst the border patrol officers are watching....

Millennium Development Goals

- The modest achievement made in a short span of time does not need more detail and analysis from us. The simple fact is that Eritrea is one of the few African countries on track to achieve 6 out of the 8 Millennium Development Goals. This is a concrete indication of this progress, and a great achievement in the promoting of human rights ideals in Eritrea

THE BASELESS ACCUSATIONS AGAINST ERITREA

Distortions of the National Service Program

Among the scores of offensive allegations, we find the mischaracterization of the National Service as forced labor, or slave labor to be very offensive. To characterize a national service program as forced labor by those who do not wish the people of Eritrea any better future only instigates more misery and servitude. Thus, they can only explain it this way. It is designed to derail the contributions the youth are

making in the educational, agricultural and infrastructure rehabilitation campaign. This campaign is designed by those who are threatened by the empowerment of Eritrean youth.

The often-repeated accusation against Eritrea is that of “forced conscription of citizens for indefinite periods.” Many countries, including those who had never seen war for decades, have mandatory national service programs ranging from 6 months to 36 (countries like Israel). Eritrean law of 18 months of national service is the average. As for the indefinite period, as we try to argue in early section, this is a result of Ethiopia’s declared war on Eritrea. The Human Rights Council better point fingers at Ethiopia not Eritrea. Eritrea has the right to defend itself

Outrageous Human Trafficking Charges

On this topic we recommend the reader to read a brilliant analysis written by Simon Tesfamariam under the title "Human Trafficking and the Human Rights Agenda Against Eritrea"⁴⁴ there is nothing we can add to the topic that the author hasn't covered. In a nutshell there is no evidence that Eritrea is involved in human trafficking, quite to the contrary the human smuggling business that started with UNMEE, the UN Mission to Eritrea and Ethiopia, coupled with the orchestration of foreign embassies has now becoming a lucrative business for many criminal elements at the expense of young Eritrean lives. The conspiracy is designed to weaken Eritrea's defense "by draining its active young generation". Again there is no evidence that Eritrea is engaged in human trafficking or human smuggling. As one US diplomatic cable admitted

"The GSE is very keen to break these human smuggling rings and dispatches agents to pose as potential customers. Other agents pose as facilitators, making all of the supposed smuggling arrangements prior to having the unsuspecting person arrested."⁴⁵

Contrary to the accusation against Eritrea, Eritrea has boldly challenged the UN to conduct an independent investigation to expose and bring all those involved to justice for Eritrea claims it "has solid evidence that individuals and groups posing as 'human rights defenders,' representatives of at least one UN agency and officials of some governments are implicated"⁴⁶ in this unforgivable crime. We urge this offer to be taken seriously.

The truth there is a lot of lies. Here is how an undercover Israeli journalist put it:

"My cover story has not been finalized yet, but luckily I run into Jeremiah, who's been in Israel for three years now. "What do I tell those who ask how I got into Israel?" I ask him. **"Lie," he says. "Don't tell the whole story. The Israelis, and mostly the non-profit groups working with the infiltrators here, like to be lied to."**

"Say you were a soldier, and that if you return to Eritrea you'll get a death sentence. Keep in mind that you must be consistent with your story. The bottom line is that everyone uses the story I'm telling you here, and this way they fool everybody," he says. "Almost none of them arrived on foot from ...it's all nonsense."⁴⁷

On the other hand, we have to underscore that, the US government together with the Ethiopian government and some UN agencies are partners in this unforgivable crime. Here is one cable that exposes one of the many schemes designed to lure young people out of Eritrea:

"Post plans to restart visa services (completely suspended in 2007) for student visa applicants; we intend to give opportunities to study in the United States to those who oppose the regime. Thus, Post requests that CA seek to establish a limited category-

⁴⁴ <http://www.blackagendareport.com/content/human-trafficking-and-human-rights-agenda-against-eritrea>

⁴⁵ US Embassy Cable. Asmara. Dec. 4, 2008. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/12/08ASMARA575.html>

⁴⁶ Osman Saleh, Minister of Foreign Affairs, State of Eritrea. <http://www.shabait.com/news/local-news/13447-statement-by-he-mr-osman-saleh-minister-of-foreign-affairs->

⁴⁷ Lie to the Israelis: <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4239481,00.html>

specific exemption to the passport requirement for Eritreans found eligible for student visas.”—Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen⁴⁸

The Accusation of Religious Persecution

Eritrea is a country known for its religious tolerance. Even though it is ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse, the country has no history of divisions along any of these lines, but particularly religious lines. Eritreans understand that your religious belief is for yourself, something that is between you and your God, you have the right to worship in any way or form, and you have to respect if not tolerate those who do not share your religious outlook. This was how life was in Eritrea for millennia. Though Christianity entered Eritrea in the first century of the Christian era and Islam came to Eritrea while the Prophet Mohammed was still alive, these two religions have coexisted without one dominating the other. The Eritrean mosaic has shown a tremendous culture of religious tolerance and harmony. This is a fact one can witness from the coexistence of churches along side of mosques on the same block. Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant Christians have no qualm of breaking bread together with their Muslim brothers and sisters. They have an understanding that while religion is a private matter, safeguarding the nation and maintaining its peace is a shared responsibility.

However, starting from the late 1980s, as Eritrea's victory over Ethiopia's colonial army was becoming certain the Eritrean landscape began to witness religious extremists both of the Muslim and Christian variety. International terrorism as we know it today, had young Eritrea within its crosshair not even a year after its official independence. Not long after that, the Eritrean landscape also began to see a cocktail of religious groups with an alphabet soup of names unheard of anywhere in the world.

In 1995 Eritrea passed a law that regulates foreign financing of religious activities, be that of Christians or Moslems. Based on this law all groups with foreign financing were required to “properly register with the government and to submit a financial audit on where the money came and how it was spent.” Fifteen out of the 19 Christian groups that were required to register either chose to ignore the registration requirement completely, or decided to selectively comply. As the US Department of State Report acknowledges in one of its reports, out of 19 groups asked to register only four complied. Others did partially, and some defiantly returned blank registration forms. In other words, these religious groups with known foreign financing were not willing to be accountable to the law.

“The Mehrete Yesus Presbyterian Church, Faith Mission Church, Seventh-day Adventists, and Baha'i Faith each submitted **a complete registration application during the period covered by this report.** ... while the Rhema Church and two other groups **reportedly submitted blank registration forms.**”⁴⁹

Religious groups such as the Kale Hiwot (Baptists), Full Gospel Church, and Meserete Kristos (Mennonite) Church have complied with some, **but not all, of the registration requirements.**”⁵⁰

It is these groups who were not willing to obey the rule of the land, groups that run afoul with the law that are now crying persecution. As the US State Department International Religious Freedom Report 2006 points out Eritreans

“**Authorities generally have not hindered the four groups that filled out their registration**

⁴⁸ US Embassy Cables. Asmara. 5 May 2009. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/04/09ASMARA142.html>

⁴⁹ International Religious Freedom Report 2003—Eritrea <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2003/23704.htm>

⁵⁰ U.S. DoS Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 2005 – Eritrea <http://www.refworld.org/docid/437c9ccbe.html>

applications in 2002 -- the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Faith Mission Church, and the Baha'i Faith -- **in holding home prayer or private study meetings.**"⁵¹

It has to be noted that some of these, who claim not to be involved in politics, have no qualm of playing in all the anti-Eritrea political campaign. Not only that, as the leaked US diplomatic cables attest, it looks at least one of the leaders who was having problems with the GoE was an informant of a foreign government.

In short the accusation against Eritrea is usually there is no religious freedom and religious activity is restricted this cannot be any farther from the truth. To the contrary, Eritreans are left alone to worship in freedom. Nobody bothers anyone for her/his believes. However, it has become a public knowledge that certain individuals have been working as agents of foreign governments. As the leaked US diplomatic cables imply (Look Annex 5) certain groups and individuals leading these group were actually set up not for religious worship but for espionage purposes. The Wikileaks document exposes an elaborate scheme on how the vilification of Eritrea is orchestrated. Words of such people should not be taken seriously.

The other issue is that of the Jehovah Witnesses. The problem with certain members of this group had never been one of freedom of worship, or as is often misrepresented by the media because they had failed to vote in Eritrea's independence Referendum. The problem is usually with those members who didn't want to acknowledge the Eritrean government and had refused to register and take up their Eritrean ID card in 1992.

Cultural Distortions

Certain groups are good at exploiting their Western audience's ignorance of the cultural underpinnings of other societies, especially those in Africa. They purposely twist and sensationalize the normal way of life in these societies to appeal to Western audiences and market their reports to get some press attention in the West. For example, here is how a Norwegian Human Rights Center, quoting Amnesty International, attempted to document human rights abuse with a straight face:

"The food was very poor ... half-cooked bread, lentils, and half-cooked unsalted cabbage, ... placed in a communal bowl ... [and] we had to eat by hand ... We were given half a cup of tea in the morning, and two meals a day at noon and 4pm. We had tap water to drink..."

- Here eating lentil and unsalted half-cooked cabbage using one's hand, from a common bowl, and drinking tap water is being considered an abuse of human rights. It is mind-boggling. Eritreans do not use spoon and fork to eat their food. As the fork is to the Europeans, chopstick to the Chinese, Eritreans use their God-given fingers to eat. Nothing wrong with it, but a westerner who does not know the culture would take it as a form of abuse, something designed to humiliate.
- In a similar vein, a January HRW report talks of human rights abuses of workers at the Bisha mining site because the workers look "poorly fed and housed; ... that food was consistently inadequate and **that meat was 'out of the question.'** ... [Workers] had no access to latrines of any kind. Overall, ... laborers 'live[d] a dehumanized, neglected and diminished way of life.' Absence of meat and modern latrines is being presented as a "dehumanizing and neglected way of life." However, HRW doesn't care to explain that, for the most part, meat is not part of the daily diet of an overwhelming majority of

⁵¹ U.S. DoS Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 2005 – Eritrea <http://www.refworld.org/docid/437c9ccbe.html>

Eritreans, rich or poor, Christian or Muslim. Most likely the Bisha diet consisted of lentil and other protein-rich legumes and whole wheat or barley based bread, yet because it is not western-style diet full of fat, salt or sugar we are being told it is an exhibit of human rights abuse. For those who care to know, for most Eritreans meat is for special holidays. As for the use of modern latrines, as sad as it sounds, this is the reality of every household in Africa outside of the main cities.

Another sensational report was one where a Christian Solidarity Worldwide video narrator levels a similar charge based on a complaint by an individual. The narrator says:

“We used to eat [sic] black tea and bread for breakfast, spoonful of lentil in water shared between eight prisoners. Saturdays were really special because spinach was blended with the usual lentil mix. On Sundays we were given the hard inedible meat from animal intestines, as disgusting as that sounds, we chose to eat it simply for the protein.”

Here again, eating in groups of eight, a cherished Eritrean dining culture is being presented an exhibit of abuse. It is the most common way of feasting during weddings or big parties. The size of the group has to be eight, no more no less. In fact, in rural Eritrea eating from your own plate instead of with a group from a big bowl or tray is considered a sign of selfishness. As for the “disgusting” inedible animal intestine, it is a delicacy meal. It is a specialty food that is only prepared for special feasts, it is highly doubtful that it was served to anyone on regular basis. Here it is deliberately being presented to bring outrage among western audiences. To an Eritrean it is not the well cleaned, seasoned and cooked animal intestine that is disgusting, but the meal the West salivates for: food like caviar, lobster, crab or pork. Plain and simple these foods are considered unclean and no one will touch them.

CONCLUSION

It is our humble position that the hostile position of targeting Eritrea by some members of the UN Human Rights Council needs to be abandoned and dialogue and engagement needs to take prominence and build partnership with the Government of Eritrea. We firmly believe that the Eritrea is firmly committed to build these relationships, and we, on our part, will also continue to work to support our people and Government to redouble their efforts in the realm of progressing human rights ideals of our citizens, to promote dialogue and strengthen the partnership with the UN Human Rights Council. We again urge the Council to give Eritrea's effort of prioritizing human dignity, human security and human development. Furthermore we urge the Council to take this opportunity to shine the light where it should be, the suffering and degradation of our population that is under Ethiopia's occupation. Like all other occupied people the Council seem to be concerned over the human rights of Eritrea's population under occupation must get due attention.

To set the record straight we have given you more than enough to read; Eritrea's history and current reality. This is Eritrea's human rights reality and context in a nutshell.

ANNEXS

Annex 1—excerpts from letters Eritrean Diaspora Groups sent to the SR

1. The people of Eritrea have struggled for their rights for more than 100 years. The 30-year struggle for Eritrea's independence, the 1998-2000 border war, and the no-war no-peace that now exist between Eritrea and Ethiopia were/are forms of struggle for our human rights. Those of us who live in the Diaspora today are products of these and are well placed, and well informed, to provide you with information that can make your report complete and comprehensive."
2. "we would like to voice our deep concern and reservation about the following: 1) the relatively short time allocated for you to gather and analyze valuable data and arrive at a coherent conclusion, and 2) your intention to go to Ethiopia to gather the bulk of the information. In this connection, we would like to raise such important questions as how do you plan to ascertain the veracity of the Eritrean citizenship and testimony of those to be interviewed by you; what mechanism do you have in place so that the "accused" party will have an opportunity to confront and establish the credibility of the "victims". These and many other issues must be exhaustively addressed. The task that you have been asked to undertake and complete within a short period of time is so complex, if not conducted properly the outcome will have a huge impact on the entire nation and its citizen inside Eritrea as well as in the diaspora. Furthermore, as you may already be aware, at this time due to the failure of the guarantors of the Eritrean Ethiopian Boundary commission (EEBC) to implement the verdict reached by the commission on April 13, 2002, for the last 13 years, Ethiopia has occupied sovereign Eritrean territory and created a delicate no-peace, no-war situation between the two countries. Hence, any information that you get out of Ethiopia for your investigation will be extremely biased. On one hand, it appears there is a concerted external effort to vilify the government of Eritrea and on the other hand there is a deliberate attempt to appease Ethiopia while sanctioning Eritrea."
3. "Since independence Eritrean women are serving their country in all aspects of life, including in high government positions. For example the Eritrean Minister of Justice is a woman; there are also four women ministers. Women are also serving as Director Generals in several ministries. More than 30% of the members of the Eritrean parliament are women. Eritrea has also women governors in some of the Six Regions of Eritrea. The second largest city in Eritrea has a woman as a mayor as are other cities and towns. In addition, the number of female educators has tripled in the first 20 years of independence; the number of female medical doctors graduating from the country's school of medicine is steadily increasing. More promising, the number of female college students is also growing in all areas of study."
4. "Our members include former freedom fighters, professionals representing various disciplines, housewives, students and come from different walks of life. As you may know the Eritrean government has a solid track record in its adoption and execution of policies pertinent to women in particular. The Eritrean government's commitment to advancing and firm stance on issues pertinent to women, such as gender equality, assignment of quotas for female members of the regional and sub-regional assemblies, the fight against female genital mutilation etc... are examples we would like to cite to illustrate the fact."
5. "As you start gathering information about Eritrea, we are gravely concerned that your efforts could be compromised by Ethiopia's agents of war and other special interest groups who would do anything at their disposal to harm Eritrea, its people and future. Therefore, we urge you to consider meeting with Eritrean-Americans and get accurate information regarding Eritrea."
6. "It is a matter of public knowledge that when the rights of the Eritrean people to have an independent State had been denied; their basic fundamental rights had been repeatedly violated by various colonizers and occupiers the very same international organization, the United Nations, that has given you the

mandate to investigate the human rights in Eritrea had failed us grossly. We strongly feel that this colossal failure to act is a proximate cause of the genocidal-level of human and property damage that ensued and we kindly demand that you include this fact in your investigation. Furthermore, the failure by the UN to compel Ethiopia to abide by the 2002 Eritrean-Ethiopian Border Commission's verdict and vacate the occupied sovereign Eritrean territory has led to the no war and no peace situation in Eritrea. This situation has required the State of Eritrea to extend the tour of national service for hundreds and thousands of servicemen and women. This too ought to be put into consideration when you undertake your investigation."

7. "For the last 15 years certain Western NGOs and media's obsessive and antagonistic misrepresentation of Eritrea, its government and its people is a matter of public record. It is also counterproductive to peace and security in the region to continuously malign Eritrea when it is obvious to all that the culprit is Ethiopia. The no peace no war situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia is a consequence of a complex reality that includes UN negligence and refusal to uphold the rule of law by enforcing the final and binding Eritrea Ethiopia Boundary Commission's (EEBC) delimitation and demarcation decisions."
8. "To say that the United Nations has historically done wrong to the people of Eritrea, would be an understatement. The failure by the UN to compel Ethiopia to abide by the 2002 Eritrean- Ethiopian Border Commission's verdict and vacate the occupied sovereign Eritrean territory has led to the no war and no peace situation in Eritrea. This situation has required the State of Eritrea to extend the tour of national service for hundreds and thousands of servicemen and women. This too ought to be put into consideration when you undertake your investigation."
9. "Rather than engage a diverse array of members of the Eritrean community, the United Nations has, thus far, limited its engagement to selective politically motivated groups and individuals that have been in violent and destructive acts within the Eritrean community. These same groups are responsible for perpetuating violent and destructive acts, including, the vandalizing of the Eritrean Community Center in Oakland, California, the burning three Eritrean Community Centers in Sweden, and the harassment and intimidation of innocent civilians who participate in Eritrean community events worldwide. Furthermore, under the façade of "human rights" and "cooperation," these groups have used highly offensive rhetoric and tactics to promote BDS (boycotts, divestment, and sanctions) against Eritrea. They have managed to align promote with foreign NGO's and the media to launch a campaign of vilification and defamation of the Eritrean State, its government and its people, including the Eritrean diaspora. We categorically reject all attempts to strangulate Eritrea's budding economy and attempts by Ethiopia and its handlers to destabilize the Government of Eritrea by sponsoring the various individuals and groups that have been a forum at the Rights Council and other international forums."
10. "From the outset, we are dismayed to see the Human Right Council Resolution labeling Eritrea as country with gross violation of human right without ever providing evidence for its erroneous allegations. Knowing the sources for the information also makes it an insult to the intelligence of our people. We would like to bring to your attention that members of our Association, who frequently visit their country, follow the development situation and actively participate and contribute in the development efforts categorically reject the allegations brought forth by fringe groups with little or no interest in Eritrea or its people. These individuals and groups have no constituencies in our communities, do not represent us, and cannot speak on our behalf. They do not represent the views of the people of Eritrea, especially the women of Eritrea, of whom we have close family links and organizational collaboration and partnership. This statement is thus sent to show you that the Resolution does not reflect the real situation and true image of Eritrea and if you want to know about Eritrea, we are here to assist you in gaining that insight and knowledge."
11. "It is our expectation that you will write a factual and honest report. We also hope that you would not be influenced by the politics of Eritrea's neighbors that you announced you will be visiting to conduct your research. We would like to remind you and as the US leaked cables will verify every vilification campaign against Eritrea has its roots in Ethiopia with critical support and approval from Washington. You should

know that at the heart of every problem in Eritrea is Ethiopia's belligerent posture towards Eritrean independence. We have serious reservation and we question the wisdom of visiting Ethiopia to gather information about Eritrea when Ethiopia's declaration of war is still on the table and the country's declared aim is the destabilization of the Eritrean government with the intent of regime change. We believe one cannot separate the right of a country to have a sovereign existence and the right of its people to live in peace from individual rights. Western powers, led by the US, have been abusing the rights of the Eritrean people now for nearly seven decades. Advising Ethiopia not to implement the border ruling, imposing sanctions on Eritrea on the pretext of bogus evidence in Somalia are the highest forms of human right abuses against the people of Eritrea. We expect that you give this the attention it deserves."

12. "The Human Rights issue in Eritrea cannot be addressed without taking into consideration the enormous sacrifices the Eritrean people paid to bring about their independence and the end of Ethiopian rule. Even though they won the war militarily, they conducted Referendum to achieve statehood for their country and earn the stamp of approval before the world body. After the declaration of independence, the Eritrean people worked with utmost diligence to rebuild their war ravaged country. They adhered to the policy of self-reliance, shunning all sorts of economic aid that foster dependency. They registered relative success in tackling poverty, ignorance and sickness and their future seemed so bright. Unfortunately, another round of war with Ethiopia brought the development to a halt. Eritrea's focus switched to stemming this new surge of hostility and to preserving its sovereignty. After the cessation of war, the Eritrea Ethiopia Border Commission delivered its Final and Binding Decision to delimit and demarcate the border between the two countries. Implementation of this ruling is hindered due to Ethiopia's intransigence and the Guarantors' [UN, EU, AU and USA] leniency. Ethiopia continues to occupy sovereign territory belonging to Eritrea. The "no-war, no-peace" situation is not without adverse effect on Eritrea. Investment and tourism are hindered because of that. The military service of the Eritrean youth is protracted because of that, for ensuring the country's sovereignty is paramount. This atmosphere is deliberately nurtured in order to deprive the people and the government of Eritrea stability. The UN, at the instigation of Ethiopia and the United States, imposed two unjust sanctions on Eritrea, unjust because they lacked corroborating evidence that Eritrea was helping Somali insurgents."
13. "From its very inception, the NUEW has been waging a two-pronged struggle to further the cause of Eritrean women. The first struggle was directed against colonial subjugation and Eritrean women played impressive role as freedom fighters. The second struggle was directed against chauvinism of their male counterpart and all sorts of cultural barriers, such as deprivation of educational opportunity, under age marriage, female circumcision with debilitating aftermath, economic dependency, etc. The Government of Eritrea, with its progressive policy, has been instrumental in furthering the cause of the Eritrean women. Today, Eritrea has women ministers, judges, educators, doctors, entrepreneurs, etc. Being abreast of the development and progress affecting women, we can be reliable witnesses of the rights accorded to women in Eritrea. We would be more than happy to share our perspective on the human rights situation in Eritrea."
14. "We believe that the UN Human Rights report on Eritrea is not only misleading but completely false. Eritreans in the Diaspora are dismayed by these reports. As the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Eritrea, you have been tasked with a very important duty to distinguish truth from falsehood, a task that needs a thorough investigation, gathering vital information and impartial analysis of the reality in Eritrea. To get all the information, you will need to address Eritrea's issues fairly and accurately and should not be swayed by the political objectives of certain groups and individuals whose main objective is to reverse Eritrea's political, economic and social gains. We believe that an investigation outside Eritrea, in Ethiopia, Djibouti or any other refugee camp is not a concrete evidence to support the accusations against Eritrea. Once Eritrean refugees reach their intended destinations, be it Europe or the United States, 95 % of Eritreans will support their government because of the fact that there is no Human right violation committed by the Eritrean government, and they know that the reason they left Eritrea was not for human rights issues but economic opportunities, needless to say that most Ethiopian and Somali refugees that claim to be

Eritreans are astronomical in numbers and the primary objective of that is to tarnish the Eritrean Government's image."

15. "You should know that at the heart of every problem in Eritrea is Ethiopia's belligerent posture towards Eritrean independence. We have serious reservation and we question the wisdom of visiting Ethiopia to gather information about Eritrea when Ethiopia's declaration of war is still active, and the country's declared aim is the destabilization of the Eritrean government with the intent of regime change. We believe one cannot separate the right of a country to have a sovereign existence and the right of its people to live in peace from individual rights. We expect that you give this the attention it deserves."
16. "There are a lot of misconceptions about Eritrea, from the condition of life to politics. This in part is due to previous reports given by reporters that neglected to acknowledge the "99%" or simply the majority. Instead the reports have been repetitive, false information cited from the "0.01%". It is nearly impossible to argue that these reports aren't biased. This is why we hope you will stray from this irresponsible, negligent way of gathering research and provide us with information that you have seen with your own eyes and share personal views that you have gathered from your own feelings as opposed to being swayed by beliefs from those who are uninformed and uneducated on human rights in Eritrea."
17. "We truly believe the task you are given to carry out, if done with honesty and good intentions, will present an opportunity for the international community to learn the truth about the state of affairs in Eritrea. As mounting evidence would show, Eritrea, through no fault of hers, has been a victim of a concerted and vicious attack on its image by special interest groups, merely for its Self-reliance policy. The task that you are given is, indeed, very complex and difficult. The politics of the Horn of Africa and the long history of Western power's interference in the affairs of the East African nations have made things very intricate but, we believe it is something a person of your caliber would not miss to understand. Be that as it may, we trust in your judgment and we are very confident that you will execute your mandate with fairness, balance and independence. We do not doubt, based on the concrete and verifiable evidence and with factual findings of your investigations that you will report to the Council nothing but the whole truth."
18. "In case you are not aware, from as far back as 1998, the State of Eritrea has been systematically vilified by using various bogus claims, including violation of human rights. Notwithstanding its progress in improving human rights of its citizens, because of its principled stance of not adhering to erroneous policies in the Horn of Africa, Eritrea has been underhandedly blamed for various things. To safeguard the integrity of the Human Rights cause we ask that you not take into account opinions from politically motivated organizations which have been involved in a misinformation campaign that has been waged against the State of Eritrea."
19. "As the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Eritrea, you will need to address Eritrea's issues fairly and accurately, and should not be swayed by the political leaning of certain groups and individuals who have an ax to grind against the Government of Eritrea. There are appropriate times and occasions for engagement with international bodies, and there are also times for saying, "Enough is Enough!" This is one of those times. Eritreans in the Diaspora cannot just sit quietly and watch a flawed process that is effectively a rubber stamp for Ethiopia's and US' agendas against the State of Eritrea. As Eritreans in the Diaspora with a vested interest on this and other issues related to the human dignity, respect, development and security of all Eritreans, we ask to be included in all discussions, especially with your office. The various erroneous reports circulating in cyberspace are undoubtedly an orchestrated attempt to call for further sanctions against our country by a body, The UN, which in addition to the United States, now has Ethiopia as its partner in crimes."
20. "We hope you will execute your mandate with fairness, balance, accuracy, and independence. We also hope you would not be influenced by the politically motivated conspiracy that is singling Eritrea. There is a

lot of garbage in the Internet, and cyber space! That can't be part of your report. There are also a bunch of so-called Eritreans who do write all kinds of evil and false stories about Eritrea. Those can't be used as valid sources and witnesses!"

21. "The UN is part of the Problem! Ethiopia is the main actor. The United States is the partner. The European Union is the supporter! The sanctions must be repealed, lifted, and annulled! They are the violations of Eritrean human rights! First and foremost, we would like you to know that the Eritrean people have been struggling for nearly a century to ensure that they live in dignity, respect, security and prosperity. Unfortunately, neither the country nor the people had been given any chance to live in peace. The reason: Ethiopia and its allies!! Any report on the human rights situation in Eritrea should take into account what Ethiopia and its allies have done and are doing to Eritrea. The US instigated sanctions, The UN Security Council endorsed it, the European Union supported it. The non-implementation of the final and binding border ruling of the EEBC, the continuous occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories, the international community's silence, but particularly the UN's indifference, and the deportation of nearly 80, 000 people from Ethiopia, for nothing but for having "a different eye color" that the Ethiopian government didn't like, are cardinal human right abuses and violation that should make the bulk of your report."
22. "Ethiopia continues to occupy sovereign Eritrean territories displacing inhabitants of the area, causing periodic acts of aggression and creating a "no war, no peace" situation in Eritrea. As a result, most of Eritrea's Youth options to exploring personal career and human developments have been put aside in order to protect the highly priced sovereignty of their nation. In addition to that, the "no war, no peace" state has negatively affected Eritrea's desirability for investment, tourism, and trade putting a dent in the country's economic growth. The lack of economic growth caused, as a result of Ethiopian occupation, is also preventing improvements in the living standards of the Eritrean people. This pattern of injustice must not be allowed to continue unresolved. The United Nations as stated in its charter must take collective and immediate measures to address threats to peace and acts of aggression by the Ethiopian government. The UN must also work to achieve international cooperation to solve Ethiopia's illegal occupation of Eritrean lands, and causing social and economic injustice at the expense of the Eritrean people."
23. "Eritrea was liberated from Ethiopia in May 1991. The country was destroyed by the previous colonizers. The government immediately embarked up on ambitious development programs focusing on: construction of infrastructure; raising agricultural productivity; promotion of private investment; investment in education; health; and nutrition; promotion of exports; protection of the environment; and mobilization of communities for development. However, the single most important factor affecting the current socioeconomic situation in Eritrea is the state of no-peace no-war with Ethiopia. This state of affairs is having a negative impact on the economy since the government has to tie up resources in defense. Against all odds, the government was able to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. It ensured that all boys and girls complete primary school by promoting gender equality and empowerment of women through education and participation. The health care in Eritrea has improved and mortality rate among children is reduced; by providing access to immunization throughout the country. Reduction on the ratio of women dying in childbirth through skilled care for every pregnancy and childbirth showed in the last 20 years. They were able to halt and reversed the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other disease through advocacy for safe sex practices, seminars and distribution of training and support materials."
24. "Dear Madam: members of our community including myself are frequent travelers to Eritrea with our family members. The Government of Eritrea is tirelessly working to promote social justice in the country. Unlike our neighbors, the Eritrean people are enjoying social harmony, peace and equality. The country's development within a short period of time is marvelous. However, some politically motivated external powers and some criminals are blackmailing the country with human right violations. Before the ruling of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC), the Ethiopian government had resettled its nationals in sovereign Eritrean lands. The EEBC had given 30 days for Ethiopia to dismantle the illegal settlements. However, in violation of the EEBC's demand, the Ethiopian Government, to this day, is occupying these

territories and adding more illegal settlements. Moreover, in violation of international law, it has refused to implement the EEBC Decision a decade after the final and binding verdict. Ethiopia is still occupying sovereign Eritrean land and this is a major violation of Eritrean human rights. As the sole guarantor of the Algiers Agreement of 2000, the UN has done nothing. This no peace, no war situation has imposed on the Eritrean people an enormous cost and has been an obstacle to Eritrea's effort to improve the lives of its people. It is thus ironic that Ethiopia and its allies are now the source of the human rights accusation against Eritrea."

25. "we would be less than honest, if we did not express our bemusement about the intention, timing and the apparent modus operandi of your mission. We are particularly concerned that, based on the little information we were able to gather through various media outlets, that you plan to visit Eritrea's neighbors, which include Ethiopia and Djibouti – two countries with whom Eritrea has some outstanding legal and political issues. In fact, by refusing to abide by and failing to implement the "Final and Binding" decision of the Eritrea Ethiopia Border Commission of 2002, the Ethiopian government has forced the Eritrean government to maintain a defensive force, which include the National Service men and women for longer period than it was originally intended! That act alone should have been a cause of alarm to any humanitarian organizations especially those that are mandated by the United Nations. Yet, neither a whisper is heard in the halls of the UN nor a finger is pointed at Ethiopia, which is also illegally occupying some sovereign Eritrean territories in contravention to its agreed upon solemn declarations and signed international documents - with the US being one of the witnesses and guarantors!"
26. "We also do not believe any useful, impartial, genuine "Facts" can be forthcoming by contacting any individuals or organizations who did not have any qualm of breaking international laws in the first place. People who have some axe to grind against the Eritrean government are unlikely to tell you that they were economic refugees - for they know "Political repression", would be a better ticket to gain them acceptance by certain gullible governments abroad. Nevertheless, if your mission starts with a clean slate, without added baggage of hearsays and innuendos concocted against Eritrea, which have been spread like wild fire by certain quarters, then you will find out that Eritrea has been hard at work to improve the lot of its people in spite of all the hurdles thrown at her. Giving priority where priority is due, she continues to build basic infrastructures including transportation and communication systems, schools and medical facilities. The government has given a priority of priorities to the attainment of food security. To that effect, extensive agricultural plots have been prepared that are being fed by modern irrigation and water catchment schemes - including building some large dams and water reservoirs throughout the country. In an attempt to alleviate the hardship the long abused people of Eritrea suffered under various Ethiopian regimes, potable water supply and electrification projects have been underway throughout the country including some renewable wind and solar energies in the remote areas of the country."
27. "You are probably aware too that Eritrea is one of handful developing countries that are expected to meet the UN Millennium Development Goals of 2015 before 2015! It is an open secret that Eritrea, not only believes in, but puts in practice the universal women suffrage by placing women on par with their male counterparts in every aspect of Eritrean life. It is not uncommon to see women in high government positions including cabinet ministries and state governorships. Eritrea is also on the record for making Female Genital Mutilation illegal irrespective of one's cultural belief. Eritrea is a country where Christians and Moslems live side by side in harmony respecting and honoring each other's faiths! Finally, we would like to let you know that we remain available for your consultation at a time and place of your convenience, for as Eritrean Americans, we care about the welfare of our people back in Eritrea."
28. "As young Eritreans, we have visited family, taught in colleges, volunteered in government and worked in Eritrea. We have witnessed the establishment of a legal certificate program, a reestablished 5 year LLM program, expansion of the community court system and the development of the draft criminal procedure, prison, civil and evidence codes over the last 3-5 years. The draft laws were developed through collecting customary law through a thorough village outreach/public input program. For example, the strict

sentencing guidelines in the draft criminal procedure code came from very particular sentencing requirements already existing in certain Eritrean village law for centuries many of which were memorized by village elders. The customary laws are already being used in the robust community court system that have continuously increased its cases per annum giving many access to courts for the first time. Furthermore, new graduate from the Asmara Law School leave the capital to work in community courts in remote parts of the Eritrea. They are building respect legal principles and the rule of law for the first time. Likewise, there is a very robust training program of prison guards, police, internal security officials and military leaders conducted by Eritrean law school graduate through the Ministry of Justice. The purpose of which is to build respect and understanding of the rule of law before the draft laws are fully implemented. Information gained from our experience will be essential to you drafting a balanced report on the Eritrean justice system and human rights. It would be malpractice to ignore it. It would be better for you to witness these developments in Eritrea yourself."

29. "But you must understand that you were appointed as special rapporteur over the objection of the named country. This is unprecedented. The resolution was tabled by Ethiopia and Djibouti who blocked Eritrea's participation in IGAD, which is also unprecedented. We were happy to see Eritrea's active participation in the Human Rights Commission. A one-sided report will likely lead to Eritrea completely withdrawing from the Commission, which seems to be Ethiopia and Djibouti goal. Please use us as mediators to rebuild trust. That way your report may actually improve human rights in Eritrea instead of being used by her enemies to beat the war drums."
30. "Our deep concern for the well being of every Eritrean impels us to share this with you so your mission is constructive, not counterproductive. Like many of the refugees you will interview in Ethiopia and Djibouti, Nearly all of us lived in refugee camps in Sudan. We had to flee Eritrea because we were occupied and attacked by Ethiopia. We are citizens of Eritrea. Something that can only be established through documented direct lineage in your local village of both parents. We are concerned that you will simply take the word of refugees in Ethiopia and Djibouti countries that do not have access to the documentation to verify Eritrean heritage. Even assuming that some are actually Eritrean, you must understand that they must tell the most outrageous, one-sided stories of human rights abuses in Eritrea to come to the prosperous west. As an attorney, you must understand the bias."
31. "History has taught the Eritrean people that the wrong doing of the United Nations in its decision to deny their right for independence has cost the people dearly both in human lives, property and lost opportunity for development. That historical misjudge had forced the country to resort to 30 years of bitter struggle to achieve independence by sacrificing so much in the process. Further more, the same UN body has again failed the country by its indifference and inaction regarding the wrongful occupation of Eritrean territory by Ethiopia; despite being the guarantor of the Algiers peace accord of 2000. Once gain, the UN has demonstrated prejudice against Eritrea by unjustly sanctioning it based on non-substantiated accusations."

Annex 2—Responses from the Special Rapporteur

From: Sr-Eritrea OHCHR <sr-eritrea@ohchr.org>

Date: June 1, 2013, 5:29:53 AM EDT

Subject: Re: Human Rights Situation in Eritrea

Dear Sir/Madam

I thank you for your email/letter and for getting in touch with me. I apologise for the delay in getting back to you. Your email came while I was away on mission. I would like to inform you that I am due to report to the Human Rights Council on 4 June 2013. The report is already available online. I would like to invite you send any further information you would like to bring to my attention in writing at this stage so that it can be kept on file.

With my best wishes
Sheila B Keetharuth
SR Eritrea

Från: Sr-Eritrea OHCHR <sr-er...@ohchr.org>

Datum: 26 maj 2013 11:07:57 CEST

Ämne: FW: Human right in Eritrea

Dear Madam/Sir

We thank you very much indeed for your email/letter and for your endeavour to link up with the mandate of the SR on the Human Rights Situation in Eritrea. My apologies for the delay in getting back to you. Your email came while I was away on mission. I have taken note of your input. I would encourage you to send any additional information you would like to transmit to the mandate in writing and I will not have the opportunity to travel to Europe before the presentation of my report on 4 June 2013.

With my very best wishes.
S B Keetharuth
SR Eritrea

From: Sr-Eritrea OHCHR <sr-er...@ohchr.org>

Date: 23. Mai 2013 20:31:23 MESZ

Subject: Re: Rapport sur la situation des droits de l'homme en Erythrée - OJES

Cher Monsieur/Chere Madame

Je vous remercie pour ce courriel, ainsi que pour la lettre jointe. J'accuse reception du contenu. Malheureusement je ne suis pas basee a Geneve et je n'aurai pas l'occasion de me rendre en Suisse avant la presentation de mon rapport au Conseil des Droits de l'Homme, prevue pour le 4 juin prochain. Par consequent, je vous demanderai de bien vouloir me faire parvenir toute information que vous souhaiteriez apporter a mon attention par ecrit.

Je vous prie de bien vouloir accepter mes meilleures salutations.
Sheila B Keetharuth

From: **Sr-Eritrea OHCHR** <sr-er...@ohchr.org>
Date: 2013/5/21
Subject: Re: Special Rapporteur NUEW Sweden

Dear Sir/Madam

We thank you very much indeed for your email and for your endeavour to link up with the mandate of the SR on the Human Rights Situation in Eritrea. My apologies for the delay in getting back to you. Your email came while I was away on mission. I would encourage you to send any further information you would like to transmit to the mandate in writing.

With my very best wishes.
S B Keetharuth
SR Eritrea

From: **Sr-Eritrea OHCHR** <sr-eritrea@ohchr.org>
Date: 2013/5/12
Subject: Re: Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Eritrea

Dear Sir/Madam

Many thanks for your recent letter and your interest in engaging with the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea. My apologies for not getting back earlier as I was away on mission.

I am based in Mauritius and will not travel to Europe prior to the presentation of my report to the Human Rights Council in June 2013, a situation which does not make a meeting possible at this point in time. Therefore, I would like to invite you to submit any information you would wish to bring to my attention in writing. Given the short time frame, any submission would have to reach us at your earliest convenience.

With Best Wishes
Sheila B. Keetharuth
SR Eritrea

From: Sr-Eritrea OHCHR <sr-er...@ohchr.org>
To: Fiseha Weldemichael <fisehawel...@sbcglobal.net>
Sent: Sunday, May 12, 2013 1:51 PM
Subject: Re: Appointment of a human rights rapporteur for Eritrea.

Dear Sir/Madam

Many thanks for your recent email, the content of which is acknowledged. We also thank you for your interest in engaging with the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea. My apologies for not getting back earlier as I was away on mission. I am based in Mauritius and will not travel to Europe or to the USA prior to the presentation of my report to the Human Rights Council in June 2013, a situation which does not make a meeting possible at this point in time.

Therefore, I would like to invite you to submit any information you would wish to bring to my attention in writing. In view of the short time frame, any submission would have to reach us at your earliest convenience, given strict reporting deadlines.

With Best Wishes
Sheila B. Keetharuth
SR Eritrea

From: **Birthe Ankenbrand** <BAntenbrand@ohchr.org>

Date: Fri, Apr 12, 2013 at 9:42 AM

Subject: Re: Dear Madame Special Rapporteur

Dear ----,

On behalf of the Special Rapporteur, I would like to inform you that she would be available for a Skype conversation sometime next week.

Kindly let me know should you be interested.

Best, Birthe

From: **Birthe Ankenbrand** <BAntenbrand@ohchr.org>

Date: Mon, Mar 4, 2013 at 12:03 PM

Subject: Re: Dear Madame Special Rapporteur

Cc: sr-eritrea@ohchr.org

Dear Sir,

On behalf of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea I would like to thank you for your letter and offer of assistance.

As you might know, the Special Rapporteur will present her first report to the Human Rights Council in June 2013 and is keen to gather relevant background information. In that context, I would like to invite you to submit any relevant information in writing. You will find more details on our website <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/countries/er/mandate/> but please don't hesitate to contact me should you have questions.

With regard to your meeting request, I wish to inform you that the Special Rapporteur is currently not planning to undertake any mission to the US. However, if you wish, we could inform you ahead of time should she envisage such a mission.

Best, Birthe

Birthe Ankenbrand

Human Rights Officer

Africa Branch

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Email: bankenbrand@ohchr.org

Tel: [+41 22 928 9465](tel:+41229289465)

Fax: [+41 22 928 9018](tel:+41229289018)

Web: www.ohchr.org

Street Address: avenue Giuseppe-Motta 48, CH-1202 Geneva, Switzerland
- UNOG, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Mailing Address: OHCHR

Annex 3—from Ethiopia's record of atrocities

- In 1967 Ethiopian soldiers massacred 3,000 civilians, burned 173 villages, killed or confiscated over 100,000 cattle.
- In 1970 Ethiopia murdered nearly 2,000 civilians, 625 of these in the village of Ona, and 360 of them inside one mosque; it also burned 18 villages. All these within few kilometers from Keren (Eritrea's second largest city).
- In 1974 after killing 240 civilians, Ethiopia burned the town of Um Hager to the ground.
- In 1975 between January and April, Ethiopian forces of occupation killed over 1,000 civilians across the country. Chief among these were the 300 civilians killed, in one night, in Asmara, Eritrea's capital; the 110 innocent villagers that were massacred inside a church in Woki Duba (3 kms away from Asmara), the 289 men, women and children that were murdered in Agordat, the capital of Barka province, and the 150 civilians that were murdered in cold blood in Hirgigo, 9 kms from the port city of Massawa. In addition, to what we stated, numerous villages were bombed to the ground.
- In March of 1976, the villages of Emberemi and Hirgigo were burned and about 300 people were killed.
- Between 1981-1987, Ethiopia killed 2,373 civilians, wounded 1,109 others, and had imprisoned nearly 5,000 civilians. In addition, about 4,100 homes were burned, 16 villages were wiped out, 3 mosques, 8 churches, 9 schools were destroyed, and millions worth of property was lost to Ethiopian deliberate destruction.
- Between March and July of 1988, Ethiopian atrocities reached a climax, when they killed over 1,200 civilians. Out of these 400 women, children and elderly people were massacred in the village of Sheeb, 80 of these were crushed by tanks. Over 32 million dollar worth of property was also destroyed.
- In 1990, few days after the capture of the port city of Massawa by the Eritrean People's Liberation army, Ethiopian warplanes using cluster, napalm and phosphorous bombs, killed over 300 and wounded more than that. About 50,000 metric tons of food was deliberately burned. Today, one can still see the scars of that bombing in the port city.

Annex 4—Eritrea's image before the 1998-2000 War

- "...Postwar Promise: Africa's Newest Nation, Little Eritrea Emerges As Oasis of Civility. Eritrea is Africa's newest nation: ...has become an unlikely oasis of peace and civility ... Secretary of State Warren Christopher calls Eritrea...a beacon of hope astride the Horn of Africa....Perhaps even more astonishing, Eritrea is beginning to develop without the corruption so common else where on the continent. Nobody to Bribe 'You can't find anyone to bribe here,' ...That makes one U.S. aid official wistful. Of more than 20 countries he has worked in, he says, 'Eritrea: is the one where you feel comfortable that every nickel you put into the place is going to be used properly....'They're on a takeoff here,' he says. 'All they need is a little wind.'"⁵²
- "...Proud, principled and impoverished, Eritrea is virtually without peer in Africa as it pursues its own model of development and vision of democracy. And when Eritrea's army won its war for independence, demobilized fighters handed in their weapons. Weapons were not sold to criminals, or stashed in expectation of further political conflict, as happened in southern Africa. The foreign investor trying to clinch a deal in Eritrea may experience many things, but the knowing wink and outstretched palm common to so many African encounters are unlikely to be among them. Irritation? Maybe. Exasperation? Possibly. But corruption? Almost never....'They have created a climate where if a businessman tried to pay a bribe, he wouldn't be able to do business,' says Mr. Robert Houdek, the US Ambassador. 'They know what an asset they have in establishing a reputation for cleanliness and they're going to work hard to maintain it.' ... Given Eritrea's grim legacy, its challenges are formidable. But thirty years ago most observers doubted that Eritrea would even win its war for independence. Who is to say that Eritrea will not again surprise the world as it seeks to liberate itself from poverty?"⁵³
- "...Though one of the world's poorest nations, with an annual per capita income of \$150, Eritrea is being seen as a model for the regeneration of a whole continent. So many African countries are struggling to recover from ruinous conflicts-Mozambique, Angola, Sera Leone-yet few exhibit Eritrea's enthusiasm. "We have all seen so much waste and loss in Africa," says Glenn Anders of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the development agency of the U.S. government that has made Eritrea its biggest per capita aid recipient on the continent." This country could be one of the biggest success stories. The nationals' sense of purpose, the discipline of its people, the hard work, which is evident in the countryside, gives us cause for hope. The government has also been financially responsible in the use of its resources."⁵⁴
- "...While many Africans are asking themselves what went wrong over the last

⁵² The Wall Street Journal, May 31, 1994

⁵³ Financial Times, 18 January 1996

⁵⁴ Washington Times, 14 September 1996.

three decades, Eritreans are embracing the future. While ethnic and religious conflicts make many African nation-states fragile, Eritreans are nationalistic and cohesive to a fault. While almost every African country depends on foreign aid, Eritrea in some cases refuses it. Now, four years after becoming independent, Eritreans are bringing to government the same confident, do-it themselves approach that helped them win the war. Government officials many of whom are former fighters now talk about the need to achieve "real freedom." They don't want to be slaves to any foreign donor country. They want economic self-sufficiency and they want to do it their way and with their own blood and sweat."⁵⁵

- "...Eritrea, Africa's youngest country, is embarking on a campaign to abolish food aid and stand on its own feet four years after its independence from Ethiopia. From the ruins of war, which cost more than 250, 000 lives (on the Eritrean side alone), the Eritreans are transforming their new nation into a country that works."⁵⁶

- "...As the program converts warriors into workers, it also addresses a major global challenge of the 1990s: With the end of the Cold War and several little hot conflicts, oversized, big-budget armies are being downsized or demobilized. And governments from Maputo to Moscow are scrambling to figure out what to do with the soldiers. Little Eritrea, about the size of Pennsylvania and with 3.6 million people, has proved to be a model--especially compared with highly publicized efforts in Cambodia and Angola, where the United Nations spent millions to restore peace and sent thousands of troops to keep it. Both efforts eventually imploded... Eritrea's success is all the more striking because the new government fended for itself for the most part--and succeeded. Last year, it completed the phased demobilization of about 60,000 of 95,000 troops. The only outside funding came for retraining--and then only in small amounts. 'The Eritreans bring a lot of positive things to the nation-building experience, including a strong sense of self-reliance,' said Gregory Craig, a senior U.S. State Department official. The odds were against success on many fronts: Ethnically, Eritrea has nine groups roughly split between Christian and Muslim--a formula for disaster from Africa to Eastern Europe, the Middle East to South Asia. Politically, Eritrea--the biblical land of Punt, later the Aksum kingdom and, over the past century, an Italian colony and an Ethiopian province--had to start from scratch. "⁵⁷

- "... In Africa, a continent racked with wars, revolutions and repression and increasingly regarded as an economic and social basket case, there is one country that is reversing the trend and today is the democratic hope of the continent. It is Eritrea, the newest African state and UN member, about the size of England (or Florida) with a population roughly that of Toronto (3.5 million), situated on the Red Sea, above the Horn of Africa, bordered by Sudan, Ethiopia

⁵⁵ The Globe and Mail 26 April 1997

⁵⁶ Africa Today May-June 1997

⁵⁷ Los Angeles Times, April 27, 1998

and Djibouti. ...Since it won independence at a cost of some 250,000 lives, Eritrea has confounded experts and reversed a trend in Africa that has been depressingly and persistently gloomy since the first country (Ghana) achieved independence from British colonial rule in 1956. As one who has reported from a score of African countries over the past 40 years, I've no hesitation saying that Eritrea is unlike anything I've encountered in Africa. After his first visit to the capital of Asmara, journalist Frans van der Houdt, with 14 years of covering Africa for a Dutch news agency, remarked: 'I'd just about given up on Africa as hopeless, until seeing this country. Now I have renewed hope.' Eritrea has no political prisoners (itself an oddity), there is no corruption in high places, no government limousines, bribery is unknown, and all the 'leaders' live modestly -- some without pay. Eritrea refuses to accept unlimited foreign aid, which it feels is corrupting; ...Religious aid is accepted only if it's secular. "⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Toronto Sun, December 27, 1998

Annex 5—Footprints of a sanction conspiracy

“On September 16, three bomb explosions were reported in the Kara Kore area of Addis Ababa. The explosions were heard at 4:45 a.m., 7:00 a.m., and 10:00 a.m. The National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), together with the Federal Police Anti-terror Task Force later reported that the bombs were part of a coordinated terror attack by the OLF and Shaabiya (Eritrea) aimed at disrupting democratic development. ...They also said that the bombs used contained parts sourced from Eritrea and were consistent with bombs used in previous terrorist attacks. ...The GoE [Government of Ethiopia] announced that the bombs went off while being assembled, and that the three dead were terrorists from the outlawed Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) with links to the Oromo National Congress (ONC). An embassy source, as well as clandestine reporting, suggests that the bombing may have in fact been the work of the GoE security forces. ... Clandestine reporting indicates that the bombs did not explode inside the structure, but rather appear to have been placed outside and detonated.”⁵⁹

*“The Flat Denial, made more plausible by the Isaias regimes antipathy to Islamic or any other kind of politico-religious activity, has taken root in the Eritrean population and even among some foreign diplomats. A number of ambassadors accredited to Eritrea remain vocally skeptical about Eritrean support to al-Shabaab and its ilk. Should the USG and/or the international community take action against Eritrea or Eritreans for support of radical Somali Islamists, the Flat Denial will have to be punctured for any measures to be effective. ...”*Given the still low (but recovering) credibility of the USG in some quarters, simple public assertions that Eritrea is aiding radical Somali Islamists will not change many minds. ... Previous USG attempts to do so flopped. One skeptical Western ambassador in Eritrea this week commented, “Are your claims of Eritrean support for al-Shabaab like those of Saddams WMD program?” “ Anything stemming from Ethiopian or Djiboutian accounts will be dismissed by skeptics as anti-Eritrea disinformation. Reaching the Eritrean public is probably easiest via diaspora websites like Asmarino or Assenna. Opposition-run radio and TV may also prove useful. With IGAD, the AU, and the UN all critical of Eritrea’s malign role in Somalia, the time is ripe for the USG to puncture the Flat Denial - the Isaias regimes only response to this mounting condemnation.”⁶⁰

“We [the US government] have advised the Prime Minister and his senior leadership ... any case against Eritrea should be raised by other countries. Any charges levied by Ethiopia would be viewed only in the context of their border conflict. The aggressive approach to Eritrea and Meles, emotional comments on Eritrea, indicate Ethiopia’s single minded focus on linking some of the extremist activities in Somalia to Eritrea,

⁵⁹ US Embassy Cables, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), 6 Oct 2006. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/10/06ADDISABABA2708.html>

⁶⁰ US Embassy Cable, Asmara (Eritrea): 18 Jun 2009. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/06/09ASMARA187.html>

and that resolution of Somalia's problems depends on the international community containing and isolating Isaias and the Eritreans"⁶¹

*"European participants generally did not support sanctioning Eritrea, ... The Italian representative questioned whether the sanctions should be focused on spoilers in general and include others beyond Eritrea. ... The Swedish representative agreed that pressure would be more useful than sanctions,... The UK representative agreed, adding that while the UK was still considering sanctions, 'a way out' for Asmara would have to be included. The EU representative saw the 'long arm of Ethiopia' behind the sanctions initiative."*⁶²

"Even though some voices in the UK Foreign Office were saying that this is a disastrous idea, sanctions should not go ahead. The push was coming from above somewhere. Ethiopia needs to be right. Ethiopia needs to be the stable center. Eritrea is now becoming, to be blunt, a pain in the ass. It will be punished. The US preferred Ethiopia. It preferred Ethiopia for all sorts of reasons. Eritrea was seen as a bunker state; they were less easy to control. Ethiopia had a more reliable military perhaps. Their policy was more directable and perhaps predictable. Whereas Eritrea, from the mid 1990s, it was clearly seen unpredictable and couldn't be relied upon to do certain things that Washington might wanted to do."⁶³

*"[Susan] Rice reminded Museveni [Uganda's President] that past experience suggested that the UNSC would not block a resolution led by African members and supported by the African Union. She shared the U.S. read that, if Burkina Faso and Uganda co-sponsor this resolution, the British will support, the French will 'keep their heads down' and will not block."*⁶⁴

*"Ambassador Rice urged Kouchner to support U.S. efforts to impose Security Council sanctions on Eritrea. ... Rice said she understood that France did not want to drive the sanctions process, but that Russia and China were hiding behind French reluctance to move ahead with sanctions."*⁶⁵

"The text of the resolution contains a range of provisions that lack adequate foundation, ... In that respect we refer in particular to the "planned terrorist attack" in Addis Ababa during the African Union summit there. The Russian Federation is categorically against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. However, in this case, the Security Council

⁶¹ US Embassy Cables, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), April 2, 2007, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/04/07ADDISABABA978.html>

⁶² US Embassy Cables, Berlin (Germany). 18 November 2009. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09BERLIN1467.html>

⁶³ Richard Reid, 10 January 2010. Eritrea's External Relations, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/eritreas-external-relations>

⁶⁴ US UN Mission Cables, New York (USA). 29 Sept. 2009. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/09/09USUNNEWYORK861.html>

⁶⁵ US Embassy Cables (USUN Mission), New York, 7 December, 2009

was not presented with convincing proof of Eritrea's involvement in that incident. We have not seen the results of any investigation of that incident, if indeed there was one.”⁶⁶

“We call on the Monitoring Group to execute its responsibilities and mandate ... with professionalism, impartiality and objectivity. The Monitoring Group should never be influenced by political considerations outside of its mandate. It is important for the Monitoring Group to closely guard its independence and professionalism in the work it does to assist the Security Council with the implementation of those measures. Equally, we call upon the members of the Security Council to desist from any temptation to use the Monitoring Group for political ends.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, December 5, 2011. <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Somalia%20S%20PV%206674%20res1.pdf>

⁶⁷ Ambassador Doctor Mashabane, <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Somalia%20S%20PV%206674%20res1.pdf>

Annex 6—Conspiracy against Eritrea's Rehabilitation & Development Tax

"Reduce the flows of critical funding from the diaspora; ... The remittances sent and the taxes paid by the diaspora are a critically needed revenue source for the GSE and we believe that the diaspora must be educated and exposed to the realities of the Isaias regime. ... Doing so will, we believe, also lead to diminished remittance flows and may encourage members of the diaspora to speak out ... and these are voices to which the GSE might listen."⁶⁸

"Tekeda [Alemu Ethiopia's State Minister of Foreign Affairs] said cutting off the flow of money to Eritrea was essential. Particularly, remittances from the U.S. was a major source of funding for Eritrea, which used such funds for arms procurement and support for extremist elements. Having the UNSC firmly in support of the African Union and IGAD in condemning Eritrea would help the Eritrean community in the U.S. to justify diaspora non-payment of taxes (2 percent of salary) to the Eritrean government. Currently, those who do not pay, Tekeda asserted, face imprisonment upon return, and imprisonment of family members living in Eritrea."⁶⁹

"Prime Minister Meles underscored to USUN Ambassador Rice during a six-hour meeting ... Isaias' calculations would be shattered, if the U.S. and others imposed sanctions on him and particularly cut off Isaias' funding from Qatar and other countries and the important funding from the Diaspora in the U.S. Isaias still imposes a mandatory 2 percent of salary tax on all Eritreans living overseas. Non payment results in family members in Eritrea being denied food ration cards."⁷⁰

"P7. Pressed by Wycoff to describe the "proactive measures being considered, Meles said one option would be to directly support opposition groups that are capable of sending 'armed propaganda units' into Eritrea Meles said that the groups with the most capability to operate inside Eritrea are those "that you don't like from the lowlands, like the Keru" who he said would be "much better able to survive in Eritrea." (NOTE. The Keru are a primarily Muslim ethnic group most of whose members live in Eritrea, although a minority live in Ethiopia. END NOTE."⁷¹

⁶⁸ US Embassy Cables, Asmara (Eritrea), 11 Jan. 2007, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/01/07ASMARA36.html>

⁶⁹ US Embassy Cables, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) 22 June, 2009. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/06/09ADDISABABA1450.html>

⁷⁰ US Embassy Cables, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) 21 May 2009. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/05/09ADDISABABA1201.html>

⁷¹ US Embassy Cables, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), 6 Oct 2006 <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/10/06ADDISABABA2708.html>

Annex 7—Unholy encounter in the name of holiness

“Reverend Zecharias Abraham (strictly protect) of the Mehrete Yesus Evangelical Presbyterian Church informed PolOff during a late May meeting of the manner in which information from Compass Direct is verified. (Note: Compass Direct is a Christian nongovernmental organization (NGO) that documents abuses of religious freedom. End Note.) Incidents occurring within Eritrea are often passed along to Reverend Zecharias from concerned citizens who either witnessed the event in question or are close to those affected by the event. Zecharias then investigates the details of this report through a variety of local sources, including zoba (neighborhood) administrators, eyewitnesses, and church members and officials. Once the information is gathered and found to be accurate, Zecharias routes the information to contacts in Open Doors (an international Christian NGO focused on human rights) in South Africa. The information is then reported to Compass Direct, with Open Doors being the direct, yet uncited, source.”

“Reverend Zecharias Abraham (protect) of the Mehrete Yesus Church informed PolOff that no less than 17 leaders of “non-compliant” churches had been rounded up by the GSE”

“During a meeting with Poloff on June 15, church leader Rev. Zecharias Abraham detailed the cause for their arrest and the machinations that occurred to secure their release.”⁷²

“Reverend Zecharias Abraham (strictly protect) of the Mehrete Yesus Evangelical Presbyterian Church met with PolOff on April 10 to discuss the status of the Christian churches in Eritrea. Rev. Zecharias provided updated numbers on imprisoned Christians, and his views on the new GSE-issued ‘religious ID cards.’ End Summary. 2. (C) According to Rev. Zecharias, currently 3,225 Christians (of Protestant and charismatic denominations) are being held in prison throughout the country without formal charge. This number includes 37 full-time pastors who have been held without charge since May 2002, and 125 Christians imprisoned since January 2008 for ‘unauthorized’ worship in private homes.”⁷³

“In an October 29 meeting with Poloff, Reverend Zecharias Abraham (strictly protect) relayed the story of an attempted escape by Mussie Issa, founder of the evangelical group, Youth for Christ, and the subsequent arrests of 45 of his supporters.”⁷⁴

“During a meeting with Poloff on June 15, church leader Rev. Zecharias Abraham detailed the cause for their arrest and the machinations that occurred to secure their release.”⁷⁵

⁷² US Diplomatic Cables, Asmara (Eritrea) <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/06/07ASMARA540.html>

⁷³ US Diplomatic Cables, Asmara (Eritrea) <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/04/08ASMARA212.html>

⁷⁴ US Diplomatic Cables, Asmara (Eritrea) <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/10/07ASMARA857.html>

⁷⁵ US Diplomatic Cables, Asmara (Eritrea) <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/06/07ASMARA540.html>