June 13, 2016

NCEA Deplores the US Government’s June 10 Statement on the COI–Eritrea

The National Council of Eritrean Americans (NCEA) in strongest terms deplores the recent statement issued by the US Department of State on the UN Commission of Inquiry on the Human Rights Situation in Eritrea. As Americans of Eritrean origin we expect a fair and balanced response than what we read. Neither the politically motivated mandate of the Commission of inquiry nor the US lead campaign to isolate Eritrea serves the cause of human right in Eritrea; in fact we believe it is a prescription for yet another war in the Horn of Africa, as Ethiopia, sensing it got a green light from Washington, has embarked on another path of aggression by attacking Eritrea a mere hours after the Department of State’s wholesale “endorsement” of the COI’s faulty findings.

We were expecting better from the Department of States which knows well that the Commission’s findings, particularly its allegations that it “finds that there are reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed in Eritrea since 1991” are patently false and an utter fabrication. As various sources have been reporting, fair-minded foreign diplomats based in Eritrea do not agree with the COI’s findings. As evidenced in the June 8 press conference of the Chair of the Commission, the image the COI tried to present was in clear contradiction with what the foreign journalists who had recently visited Eritrea witnessed. As we will try to show below, experts that have been studying Eritrea are also voicing their strong disagreements with the Commission’s findings and its faulty methodology.

The State Department in its Press Release from June 10, 2016 stated that: “United States takes note of the recently issued report by the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Eritrea, in particular its conclusion that there are reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed in Eritrea. We have repeatedly expressed grave concern about the human rights situation in Eritrea, and that concern has been reinforced by the COI’s findings” is beyond the pale. As Americans of Eritrean origin we find this US rush statement designed to influence the Geneva Process reckless and offensive. As a community with an intimate knowledge of the reality on the grounds in Eritrea we had submitted to the Commission thousands of our written testimonials along with scores of thousands of other Eritreans in the Diaspora; none of which was taken into consideration.

Not only was our testimony neglected, according to Atlantic Council’s Bronwyn Bruton, the Commission has also “refused to consider the academic literature on Eritrea;
refused to use press reports; refused to speak with experts who’d traveled recently to the country; refused to speak to UN staff and Western diplomats inside the country.”

Instead, as Tanja R. Müller of the University of Manchester stated, many people “who live, have lived or continue to visit Eritrea, have multiple connections within the country and could have contributed to the COI’s understanding. They were deliberately ignored, and the result is a document that describes a country many Eritreans do not recognise.”

Müller adds that the COI’s report was “predominately based on interviewees with self-nominated participants in the diaspora [who] in different ways left Eritrea, often experiencing abuse on their journeys, and have learned to navigate international refugee law and asylum systems. This does not make their testimonies wrong, but would call for a nuanced understanding or interpretation in any social science discipline. Human rights advocacy might not be social science, but one would at least expect inconsistencies to be followed up.” As she tries to underline how the COI wholesale accepted a fabrication she mentions the following: “A prime example of those who has travelled the internet widely, when a representative of Canadian mining company Nevsun, accused in the 2015 COI report to use slave labour to dig underground tunnels at Bisha mine in Eritrea, made the point that Bisha is in fact an open-pit mine.” Louis Mazel had also testified that the Bisha mining is indeed a “huge open-pit mine”, without any underground tunnels. Not only this, Müller also states that the findings of the COI are based on testimonies of witnesses “recruited by human rights activists who have their own means of advocacy and persistence, and for example hire public lobbying companies in order to spread their narrative of Eritrea (I was for a while bombarded by emails from such a company with sensational news until I contacted them and asked to be removed from their list). ... What is harder to justify and exemplifies the flaws in the COI report is the fact that all additional experts that were consulted came from the spectrum of human rights advocates in a broad sense, and included hardly anybody with recent first-hand experience of Eritrea.”

Bronwyn Bruton rejects the Commission’s substandard investigation using these words: “the team was only able to do field research in Ethiopia, which is effectively at war with Eritrea. Obviously, this is shockingly poor scholarship—if a college undergrad tried to ignore all academic scholarship and spoke only to people who agreed with him, he’d get flunked out of school.”

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1 Ashish Kumar Sen: What the UN Gets Wrong About Rights in Eritrea: A finding of crimes against
3 ibid
The COI’s faulty conclusion is based on at least three faulty premises. As any student of elementary logic would agree, all those who start with false premises can easily imply any conclusion they wish to get at. These false premises include:

1. **“All those that leave Eritrea are leaving for political reasons”**. Bruton has this to say on this one: “The mere fact that 60,000 people are leaving Eritrea isn’t necessarily proof of a massive human rights crisis. ... Eritreans have until extremely recently, been granted automatic asylum rights in Europe. There are push and pull factors at play.”

Furthermore, the President of the United State’s in his 2012 address to the Clinton Global Initiative of September 25, 2012 had admitted that his government has a direct and active hand in the pull factors that are making people to leave Eritrea and other African countries pretending to be Eritreans. The President’s words were: “I recently renewed sanctions on some of the worst abusers, including North Korea and Eritrea. **We’re partnering with groups that help women and children escape from the grip of their abusers.** We’re helping other countries step up their own efforts. And we’re seeing results.” The results he is seeing is not only the flooding of Europe with African imposters who claim Eritrean identity falsely but also the suffering of women and children in the hands of human traffickers in North Africa and the death of hundreds of innocent Africans by drowning in the high waters of the Mediterranean Sea hoppin the paradise that was promised to them by the US President and his agents.

Wikileaks documents\(^4\) also show how US diplomats are willing to bend and outright violate US visa laws in order to encourage Eritrean “regime opponents” to flow to the US. Again innocent youth falsely promised a paradise and free education are perishing in the Sahara Desert. The New York Times also reported in 2010\(^5\) how some Asmara based American diplomats were among those facilitating the exodus of youth from Eritrea. It is ignoring these facts the State Department issued its statement on June 10.

2. **“All those that claim to be ‘Eritreans’ are Eritreans”**. Every East African, Ethiopian, Somali or Sudanese for that matter even a West African knows that the easiest ticket a political asylum in Europe, Canada or the USA is to claim he or she is an Eritrean. It is Ethiopians, with the help of the minority regime in Ethiopia who are taking advantage this blanket preferential treatment of “Eritreans”, as a result every 4 out of 5 of those who have been resettled in the US are actually non Eritreans who falsely claimed Eritrean identity. Müller states that “In contrast to citizens from a different African country, the Gambia, who

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\(^4\) https://www.wikileaks.org/pludcables/09ASMARA146_a.html

top the list of those having entered Italy illegally this year, Eritreans are predominately given asylum and thus it pays to be Eritrean or rather pose as such. There are multiple reasons to leave Eritrea – or any other African country for that matter.” The BBC’s Mary Harper in her recent report from within Eritrea puts it this way: “Western and other diplomats based in Asmara tell me the Commission of Inquiry’s report is “unhelpful” and does not reflect accurately the current situation in Eritrea. [They] describe as “absurd” descriptions in the media and elsewhere of Eritrea as "Africa’s North Korea". An international human rights worker I meet outside the country says an estimated 30% of people who claim to be Eritrean for asylum purposes actually come from Ethiopia. I'm told others are Sudanese. Some Ethiopians and Sudanese share languages, physical characteristics and cultures with Eritreans, and it is significantly easier to obtain asylum as an Eritrean.” Andreas Melan, Austria’s Ambassador to Ethiopia corroborates Harper’s report for he is quoted to have admitted that “30 to 40%” of those who claim to be “Eritreans” when they reach Europe are actually “Ethiopians”. What these means is the Commission is falsifying numbers to reach its desired conclusion.

Trying to underscore how numbers are being cooked at will by the Commission, Müller draws a parallel between the number of people that were claimed to being killed every month in Darfur and the number of Eritreans that are leaving their country every month by saying: “Maybe 5000 has become a magic figure in relation to when to trigger a ‘crimes against humanity’ claim?”

3. All those that the COI interviewed will tell anything that jeopardize their pending political asylum cases or recent approved cases. This premise is best debunked by what an Israeli investigative Journalist of Ethiopian origin, Dabby Adeno Abebe, found in 2012. “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 Egypt to Israel. None of us crossed any deserts...it’s all nonsense.”

Since the mid 1940s Eritrea and Eritreans have been victims of numerous politically-motivated unjust policies orchestrated by few vengeful diplomats who chose to place their own ego and interest above of that of the people of the United States and the

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6 Dabby Adeno Abebe, The dark side of Tel Aviv: Journalist poses as African infiltrator, spends week in Tel Aviv’s most volatile neighborhood http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4239481,00.html (Last Accessed March 1, 2016)
Eritrean people. Individuals who used and abused their position in the Department of State or the White House to frustrate the Eritrea people’s aspiration for independence and after a hard won independence to undermine the independent government of Eritrea to promote their sinister agendas of regime change. In the words of a British historian: “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....”

The numerous “Unprovoked US Hostilities Against Eritrea” are well documented and one can find them in the reference given below. For now it suffices to list the following egregious offenses we witnessed since 1998:

• A botched US mediation process and escalating the 1998–2000 border war by giving Ethiopia a green light to bomb Asmara, Eritrea’s capital, June of 1998;
• Purposely looking the other way when the minority government in Ethiopia was violating the human rights of 76,000 Ethiopians of Eritrean origin through the heinous act of ethnic cleansing and deporting them by arrogantly saying it had the right to do so even for not liking the “color of their eyes.”
• Coaching and encouraging the minority government of Ethiopia not to accept or implement the final and binding decision of the Eritrea Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC).
• Abusing their influence in the UN Security Council to protect Ethiopia when it was in clear breach of international law and attempting to create alternative mechanism to violate the “final and binding” EEBC decision so as to award Eritrea’s sovereign territories to Ethiopia.
• Serving as the architects and surrogates of the illegal sanctions that were imposed on Eritrea in 2009 and of all the blatant fabrications that accompanied it and arm-twisting members of the Security members, particularly the African members.
• Serving as lead lobbyists at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva to create the illegal mandates of the Special Rapporteur and Commission of Inquiry as they saw the 2009 sanctions were being discredited and all other members of the Security Council were asking for their lifting.

Given all these, the statement of June 10, 2016 seems to be designed to restore credit to an otherwise discredited report by the COI. Any attempt designed to support a fraudulent COI findings reached through a fraudulent methodology is a disservice to the Eritrean people’s attempt to live in dignity and liberty and is ultimately against the interest of the United States. The US State Department should refrain from being

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influenced by people who have an axe to grind against Eritrea. As Eritrean Americans we would like to see a US policy based on a far-sighted analysis that creates and nurtures friendship rather than being influenced by egotistic personalities who use their high offices to block and frustrate experts' recommendations for positive US/Eritrea engagement. Once more the NCEA would like to say “enough is enough”!