



Statement on the violations of human rights by the ruling regime in Eritrea

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The Honourable Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights;

Your Excellencies, Delegates of Governments;

Your Excellencies, Representatives of Human Rights Organizations;

The Honourable Ms. Sheila B. Keetharuth, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Since the ascension of the current regime in Eritrea and its ruling party PFDJ to power 26 years ago, it has displayed hostile attitudes and committed continuous violations of human rights in addition to total disregard to its primary duty and obligation towards its people. It has not only denied the people their basic human and people's rights but also systematically and intentionally violated abused those rights. Hereunder we briefly highlight examples of the most belligerent violations and abuses committed by the regime:

1. Civil & Political Rights:

i) The Right to Life:

This inalienable God given natural right that human beings must enjoy including the respect of one's dignity; is not only denied but also is grossly violated and abused by the ruling regime in Eritrea. Consequently, many lives are intentionally and systematically endangered or harmed, and many others exposed to life threatening hazards and fatal measures through:

- Non-judicial indefinite arrests of individuals and groups that had started early with the mass arrests of private Islamic schoolteachers and old veteran fighters in 1994, the fate of whom, similarly the fate of other later prisoners has remained unknown until now.



- Other blatant abuses to the right to life have become a common and regular routine practices of the regime such as torture, killings, disappearances, and ethnic cleansing. That has unabatedly continued throughout the reign of the incumbent regime in Asmara. Practices that are considered as flagrant violation to the right to life for all Eritrean citizens whose lives are risked and held to ransom at the mercy of the regime for the simplest reasons of disapproval.

ii) The right to Freedom:

- The government claims in its last report to the African Commission for Human and Peoples Rights conference (May 2018) in Nouakchott, Mauritania that 'the arrests it carries out only involve people who are considered risky and pose serious dangers to the security of the nation'. An unwitty and false justification to legalize their illegal actions that contradict the essence of the right to freedom that any individual is entitled to. Under that false pretext tens of thousands of people are indefinitely detained and thus lost their freedom in the absence of any legal judicial process. Thus, people remain arbitrarily detained without any charges or access to justice and information about their whereabouts. This applies to all types prisoners of conscience, ranging from political dissidents, reformists, critics of the regime's policies, religious personalities, community leaders and elders who are all languishing in prison dungeons under extremely inhumane and unbearable life conditions some in incommunicado. Moreover, all exposed to torture and extra judicial executions, killings, and disappearances.
- Other harsh repressive measures, disproportionate violence, assaults, and indiscriminate arrests of peaceful demonstrators are exercised simply for reasons of openly expressing views and demanding rights. As that of the case of the Afar women who demonstrated in Bada region in the province of Afar Dankalia in November 2016 to stand up for their right to food against interference by the regime's security agents. And, as in the case of the Al-Diaa private school demonstrations in Asmara in January 2018 where hundreds of participants including breath-feeding mothers, children and elders still remain in custody for demonstrating for their right to freedom of education choice.

iii) The right to Equality

The regime's inherent nature of hegemony and domination, and its policies and practices contradict and violate the essence of the right to equality and nondiscrimination between people, as it favours certain social groups and practices



policies based on grounds of ethnicity, culture, religion, and language; whereby the regime continuously excludes, oppresses, and marginalizes the majority of the Eritrean national components. A matter that will negatively impact the future of peaceful coexistence that has prevailed for long periods among the diverse Eritrean communities.

iv) Freedom of Religion & Belief

Despite the regime's claims of being secular, in reality it practices biased policies against Muslims and adherents of other minority Christian denominations in the country. It widely interferes with religious freedoms such as the appointment of religious leaders to control and administer how they go about their religious affairs. Muslims cannot choose their Mufti - their chief spiritual figure – freely, have been deprived of access to and use of many of their mortmain (habous), cannot build or renew mosques as needed, and it goes without saying that support from the government is non-existent, while benevolent endowments by faith followers from abroad for the running, maintenance, and repairs of mosques are severely restricted under the false pretext of curbing Jihadist inclinations.

v) Freedom of Expression

The Eritrean regime has been notoriously dubbed the North Korea of Africa for its damning record for continuous and persistent breach of the right to freedom of expression in its different forms. It has committed violations of this right ranging from banning of free press, imprisonment of independent journalists, and the suppression of all other forms of freedom of expression. Therefore, no wonder Eritrea has been deservedly considered the most dangerous place for journalists thus holding the bottom rank in list of countries based on the degree of freedom of expression in the world.

vi) Women in the developing countries generally are subjected to dual oppression from society and governments. In Eritrea, they suffer even more as a consequence of being drafted to the compulsory military service that callously subject them to forced labour, risks of rape by senior officers, and various forms of degradation, persecutions, torture, and imprisonment.

vii) Waves of forced human migration continuously flow outside the country monthly in their thousands. Especially youth who in their effort to escape compulsory indefinite military service and seek safe havens; face enormous risks of the regime's official "shoot-to-kill" policy, falling victims to criminal rackets of human traffickers, encountering fatal hazards in deserts and oceans, as well as enslavement by outlaw bandits. They brave all these perils in order to escape the miserable, inhumane, and hopeless conditions imposed by the regime in Eritrea.



2. Social, Cultural, and Economic Rights:

The regime has not only totally abandoned its responsibilities and duties towards observing and realizing the needs of its people in the different aspects of life - political, economic, and cultural rights and aspirations of the people but persistently denied and violated all basic rights and freedoms of the Eritrean people.

i) The right to Property and Land ownership:

The regime has engaged in the process of land and property confiscations, particularly in the Eritrean Lowlands. This systematic policy has been pursued with the aim of imposing demographic changes in the Lowlands at the expense of displacing the original inhabitants for mere erroneous political calculations. A matter criminalized by all international laws and norms, among these, Article 19 of the African Union Charter that criminalizes the illegal seizure of property of third parties despite the fact that the Eritrean regime is one of its signatories.

Contrary to the traditional laws of land ownership that prevailed from time immemorial among different societies in Eritrea where society members naturally owned and lived on the land of their ancestors, the government confiscated the right to own land declaring its "Land Reform Proclamation" of 1994 whereby the sole land owner is the government. This detrimental law has particularly been applied in the vast pastoral land areas of the Eritrean Lowlands. Where the original inhabitants are either displaced or not allowed to return from refugee camps in the Sudan since their flight in the mid-sixties of the last century. The ongoing resettlements of Eritreans from the Highlands comes at the expense of the original inhabitants and is causing a demographic change in the Lowlands. This is a recipe for the breakout of internal violent civil conflicts between the original owners and the new settlers.

ii) Forced and unwarranted displacement of citizens in towns and villages such as Adi Kayeh, Tessenie, Karkabt, Arrafli, and Hagat, in 2017 from their homes after demolishing their houses without prior notification and legal justification and without any compensation and provision of alternative accommodation.

iii) The recurring bombardment of the Red Sea Afar fishers one of which took place in May 2017 disputing their right to earn their living as they have always done for generations on the Red Sea coast.



iv) The right to Work:

The government discourages and even prevents some entrepreneurs from working for their own interests by indirectly trying to outcompete them from the market or directly interfering by withdrawing their business and trade licenses in imports & export, construction & building licenses, transport, and other businesses.

Recruiting and engaging most of the working force in indefinite military conscriptions is not only depriving the country of its productive man-power, especially the youth, but it is forcing people against their will to work without or for little return, which is a clear contradiction with their right to work and choose the kinds of jobs that will bring them fulfillment and commensurate reward.

v) The right to Health:

The government has never formally declared a national budget for the country so far. Thus, apparently not allocated adequate funds to cover expenses for all necessary public services including health service. Health service as a vital sector lacks enough investment to run and develop it properly. It is badly suffering from the lack of professional personnel, necessary facilities, and medical supplies. Consequently, the population at large is suffering from health problems particularly the vulnerable sectors; children, women, and the elderly.

vi) The right to Education:

The last stage of secondary education in Eritrea is closely linked to compulsory military service. Those who try to avoid the compulsory military conscription lose the opportunity of completing their secondary education and thus lose the chance to attending further undergraduate courses. Many girls stop going to school at early stages and get married in order to escape military conscription with all the risks that it entails. Also, some adherents of Christian Pentecostal denominations, such as Jehovah's Witnesses whose beliefs don't accept militarization, are all denied the chance of finishing basic secondary education levels. A matter that is considered a violation of the right to education for all.

vii) The right to Housing:

The government has re-owned the formerly illegally nationalized people's properties from the Derg - the former Ethiopian military regime - but instead of redistributing the properties after independence to their original legal owners, it endorsed the status quo. They also confiscated properties belonging to political opposition figures and levied retroactive high taxes for years going back to the Ethiopian occupation period on properties of war-displaced citizens, thus extorting astronomical sums which in many cases exceed the price of the property. In other words, indirectly forcing owners to abandon claiming them back. The regime has



also conducted many campaigns to forcibly evict and demolish properties of individuals in a number of cities under the pretext of re-planning purposes, doing so without prior notice or compensation to the owners leaving many families homeless.

vii) The right to Food:

Eritrea most of the time suffers from lack of producing adequate food reserves due to recurrent draughts and ill-managed economy and land policies. The government is always in utter denial of this fact, not only that but goes to the extent of refusing access to or receive help from humanitarian and relief organizations. The indefinite military conscription has engaged almost the whole working power in nonproductive military service, and therefore created a drastic shortage in skilled hands that are necessary to farm and produce food.

3. Crimes against Humanity:

The government executes a policy of terror and fear to rule country. In so doing, it commits systematic and wide spread gross violations of human rights that amount to levels of crimes against humanity. Throughout the years of its rule, the government has inflicted untold sufferings on the citizens by engaging people forcibly in indefinite military conscription and forced labor without proper pay or acceptable work surroundings. It continues imprisonment of tens of thousands without charges recourse to justice, while kept under inhumane conditions, where murder, extra-judicial executions, torture, rape, enforced disappearances are the norm, not the exception.

4. Women's Rights:

The regime not only failed to preserve the traditional uphold respect and rights of women in Eritrea but systematically violates and abuses their rights on all aspects of life; particularly in education, land and property ownership, health, sexual committing gender-based discrimination, violence and rape which have become common practices in military camps and detention centers.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Eritrean regime has never complied with its obligations in accordance with the international conventions and resolutions concerning human rights though it is a signatory. It persistently had continued to violate and abuse the human rights of its people in a de facto impunity. Though



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details of these violations were recurrently reported by local and international human rights organizations, the most important of which are the series of reports compiled by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, Ms. Sheila B. Keetharuth and the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea. The contents of these reports clearly confirm that systematic violations of human rights have been committed in Eritrea through the years of the regime's rule that some of which amount to the level of crimes against humanity.

We therefore appeal to the Human Rights Council and the international community in general not only to condemn the Eritrean regime's violations and abuses of the human rights of its citizens, but we ask that they have to be held accountable to these crimes and brought to the International Criminal Court for justice to be done.

We hereby feel confident to confirm the authenticity of the content of the reports compiled by the Special Rapporteur, and highly commend the efforts and the work done by the Special Rapporteur and the Office of the High Commissioner.

We also stress the importance of the continuation of the inquiry work, strongly support, and call for the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea to continue future work on that aspect in the same direction. In addition, we express our deep appreciation and gratitude for Ms. Sheila B. Keetharuth for the professional work she performed and the authentic and unbiased reports she managed to compile against all odds. Hoping the world community to promptly act based on the knowledge available and in accordance with its duties toward our people to hold the regime to account for its crimes.

With all respect, appreciation, and gratitude.

Executive Office,

The Eritrean Lowlanders League (ELL)

25th June 2018

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