

# NECS-EUROPE

## Network of Eritrean Civil Societies in Europe (NECS-Europe)

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### **The COMMISSION**

9 December 2005

**Mr. José Manuel Barroso**

President of the European Commission

**Mr. Louis Michel**

Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid

**Ms. Benita Ferrero-Waldner**

Commissioner for External Relations

### **The COUNCIL**

**Mr. Javier Solana**

Secretary-General, High Representative for the CFSP

### **The PARLIAMENT**

**Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles**

President of the European Parliament

## **Re.: URGENT APPEAL TO THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS**

Dear Sirs, Dear Madame,

Tomorrow is the international Human Rights Day. On this occasion, the members of our organization - Network of Eritrean Civil Societies in Europe (NECS) - have decided to, once again, remind the Institutions of the ever degenerating state of human rights and the increasingly systematic violations of all the fundamental freedoms in their country of origin, Eritrea.

To mark the event, they are staging today a demonstration in front of the European Institutions here in Brussels. The initiative has the full support and the active participation of the members of the Eritrean Democratic Alliance as well as other opposition political parties in exile.

The NECS is composed of several civil society organizations from Germany, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, The Netherlands, The United Kingdom and Switzerland. The Network's member organizations were founded four years ago in the aftermath of the last devastating Ethio-Eritrean war and the democratic awakening in the country that it entailed. Its members are pro-democracy activists most of whom are European-Eritreans already established in the European continent as well as youth from the latest wave of refugees fleeing the intolerable persecution and oppression currently raging in Eritrea.

As defender of human rights and promoter of democracy and the rule of law, the NECS deeply shares the founding values of the European Union and takes its Institutions as major world players in the areas of its primary concerns. As you well know, the outrageous violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the regime in Asmara have and are being closely followed up and seriously recorded by the most important, reliable and highly respected international governmental and non-governmental bodies.

The European Parliament, itself, has by its groundbreaking Resolutions of February 6, 2002 and November 19, 2004, brought to the attention of the world community the massive and persistent violations of these rights in Eritrea. In response, the Parliament has, on these two occasions, established the fact that the abuses perpetrated by the regime constitute an unequivocal violation of

Article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement. Abuses that call for the opening of the consultation procedure pursuant to Article 96 of the said Agreement. The Parliament has repeatedly recommended that the Commission and the Council urgently use the instruments at their disposal and take firm and effective actions on the issue.

The NECS notes, moreover, that, since the open outbreak of the political crisis between the EU and the Eritrean regime in September 2001, the ministerial troikas that were set up to relate with the regime on the issues of democratization, human rights and the rule of law - guiding principles of EU's external relations and development strategies - were systematically rejected by the powers that be in Asmara. The NECS also notes that The Country Strategy Paper 2002 - 2007 that was subsequently drawn to govern the relations between the EU and Eritrea still takes up these same issues, further providing that in relation to the pressing issue of democratization, the EU will use the instrument of political dialogue, a cornerstone of the Cotonou Agreement.

However, it is with great sadness that NECS has to come to the conclusion that the above strategies and measures have so far had no effect, be it in helping generate any hopes of democratization or in simply in alleviating the never ending suffering of the people of Eritrea. At the heart of the failure of the endeavor is the adamant and persistent refusal of the regime to adhere to the universally accepted values of freedom and democracy and, more specifically, to abide by the founding principles of the Cotonou Agreement. The concept of political dialogue is simply being subverted and turned into derision by the regime. It is in light of the regime's rejection of the terms of the agreements it has entered into freely that the NECS is doubtful that The European Union Strategy for Africa adopted last October and whose development premises are good governance, peace and security will ever correctly apply to Eritrea.

The perversion of the political environment in our country of origin is taking frightening dimensions. The regime is, as of late, openly questing the validity of the universally recognized values of human rights, democracy and rule of law. At best, it is putting into doubt their applicability to the Eritrean situation. The hard and unacceptable reality being that Eritrea is falling into the dark limbo of totalitarian dictatorship by each passing day. Political imprisonments, arbitrary detentions, disappearances, suspected extra judicial detentions and executions, torture and inhuman treatment of prisoners, group executions, ever widening religious persecutions, forced conscription's, sexual violations of women conscripts are becoming common practices. They have actually worsened these past years. Testimony is the new and huge influx of Eritrean refugees, a good number of whom are losing their lives in the high seas in their desperate attempts to reach the shores of the European continent. As a matter of fact, Eritrea is presently, in comparison to its population size, one of the biggest generators of refugees in the world.

Today, the Eritrean regime is among the top of the list of democracy and freedoms killers as identified by numerous human rights organizations. Eritrea has effectively become the new gulag of the African continent. It is perhaps the only country in the world without a constitution. And one of the very few remaining ones that ban free press, political pluralism, free enterprise, free and fair elections, independent judiciary and similar constituent elements of the democratic system. The regime has thus all the qualities the make it a one-man dictatorship whose Stalinist-like grip is stifling the society and may eventually lead to the nation's demise.

If we are here today in Brussels, it is because we believe that there is an urgent need to echo the pains and ordeals of the people of Eritrea to the peoples of Europe. In the wake of the third millennium, the people of Eritrea are living under fear and are consequently reduced to the sheer level of collective servitude. Our cry is for help from the EU to help deliver our people from fear and reinstate their human dignity.

The NECS thus implores the EU to be consistent with the defining elements of its international policy and live up to its universal engagement to advance democracy and human rights. That the EU consciously avoid any risk of abandoning our country or origin, Eritrea, in face of the regime's

arrogant refusal to abide by the rules that govern international relations. The NECS is convinced that there is no fatality in the havoc that has befallen our people. As you very well know from your own history, the greatest threat to democracy and peace is the cynical attitude of unspeakable consequences known as: the banalizing of evil.

This being the backdrop, the NECS is conscious of the fact the ineffectiveness of the EU policies on Eritrea has lately been compounded by what is known as the demarcation issue.

To start with, the NECS strongly commends the EU's firm stand on the final and binding nature of the EEBC's decision on the matter. In line with the EU, the NECS strongly believes that there should be no precondition attached to the implementation of the said decision. It espouses, furthermore, the firm opinion that the final solution should strictly follow the peaceful path and should avoid any recourse to armed conflict. In relation to this, the NECS confidently affirms that the Eritrean people do not want to go to war anymore. One simple reason being that a renewed war may very well lead to the implosion of their country. In real terms, the outright liquidation of the thirty years long superhuman sacrifices they put up to gain their independence. The people of Eritrea are helpless and aggrieved to stand by and simply observe that they have had and still have no say in the cardinal matters of war and peace. They have this feeling of being totally disarmed and dishonored in continuously giving up their children as sacrificial lambs to the vain tactics, adventurism, brinkmanship, incompetence, whims and follies of the one-man dictatorship.

Most of all, the NECS is vehemently opposed to the regime's attempt to link the agenda of democratization to the demarcation of the borders. For the NECS, this is yet another imposture. The before/after stance of the powers that be is a shameful ploy to hoodwink the simple minded. If the regime is opposing democratization with full force, it is simply because of its very deep seated nature.

In line with the peoples of Europe, members of the Network are convinced that peace and democracy are indivisible by nature. There can't be any peace, a durable one, without democracy. If the peoples of Europe have enjoyed sixty years of peace and thereby built the EU, it is simply because of the triumph of democracy over the scourges of fascism and stalinism. The same can be said of the Eritrean case. The last devastating war with Ethiopia is nothing else but a reflection of the democracy deficit in the region. And demarcation and thus the advent of peace will not make sense if it is not based on, propelled by and directed by democracy. The premise of first demarcation then democracy is false. There is no primacy of former on the latter. The NECS takes democratization and demarcation as a continuum.

The NECS consequently recommends that the EU confront the regime's attempt to make the issue of democracy dependent on demarcation. The Network is actually embarrassed to note that the regime is accusing the international community, including the EU, of not upholding the rule of law in the ongoing dispute. No one is due to cede to that argument. The regime is in no plausible position to invoke the rule of law when it is openly and viciously attacking the very concept when it comes to internal matters. In fact, the NECS believes that if the world community is not going the extra mile to have border decision implemented, it can, in great part, be because of the totalitarian dictatorship that is wreaking havoc in the country. Pressurizing Ethiopia further may be taken by the major democracies as backing the agenda of what is generally being considered as a rogue regime.

In face of all this, we, democrats, are dismayed to note that, due to sad nature, the dictatorship is also impeding our people from seeing the return of peace in the region. The regime should democratize if it seriously wants a final and lasting solution of the border problem. The NECS is keen to see the democratization of the country of origin along and together with the demarcation. The border settlement should in no way end up in the further consolidation of the dictatorship which, to many serious observers, is the hidden agenda of the regime.

The NECS is thus calling on the EU to push forward the democratization agenda all in supporting the final and binding nature of the boundary decision. The EU should reject all attempts to

compartmentalize the two. Democratization and respect of the fundamental freedoms should and cannot be dependent on conjectures. No one is in a better position than the EU to drive forward the basic idea that there is no durable peace without democracy as there is no durable development without peace and thus democracy.

In guise of conclusion, the NECS together with all the members of the participating Eritrean opposition parties in exile:

**the European Parliament:**

- to renew and update its condemnation of the persistent and escalating violation of human rights in Eritrea;
- to reemphasize its previous calls for the formation of independent inquires into the mass killings of Adi Abeito and take note and do the same for the recent mayhem of Wia;
- to condemn the regime for its refusal to receive the EU ministerial troikas and for its deliberate undermining of the principle of political dialogue as provided by the Cotonou Agreement
- to highlight its stand on the need to respect the fundamental human rights and the basic precepts of the democratization of the country;
- to reemphasize its previous demands for an inter-Eritrean national conference of various parties and civil society organizations as a means of putting the country on the right path to democracy and sustainable development;
- to underline its previous calls to the Commission to open the consultation procedure with the Eritrean authorities as provided for by Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement;
- to call for the implementation of the EECB's decision in simultaneously demanding the engagement of the country in the path to democracy;

**the Council and Commission:**

- to take formal note of the fact that the abuses perpetrated by the regime constitute an indisputable violation of Article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement;
- to condemn the regime's refusal to receive the ministerial troikas;
- to put more energy, conviction and political resolve in highlighting and defending human rights and fundamental freedoms in Eritrea;
- to play a major role within other international organizations, mainly the UN Human Rights Commission, in the demand for the respect of these rights in the country;
- to adopt a more proactive stance and to firmly confront the regime's wanton undermining of the principle of political dialogue;
- to consider applying Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement in the face of the regime's refusal to live by the letter and spirit of the said Agreement;
- to reject the Eritrean government's political manoeuvres of tying the demonetization issue with border demarcation;
- to stay firm and resolute on the agenda of democratization while supporting the immediate implementation of the border decision;
- to be vigilant that that the eventual implementation of the EEBC's decision will augur the advent of democracy into the country and not the further entrenchment of the dictatorship;
- to recommend to and encourage its members to grant refugees status to all those Eritreans who are seeking asylum in their respective countries;
- to call upon all its members to actively support and encourage the defenders of human rights, democracy and rule of law as well as the autonomous civil society organizations that are working in favor of the democratization of the Eritrean society.

For the NECS  
The Coordinating Committee

copy to: Mr. Geert Heikens  
Head of EU Delegation to Eritrea