

WHO WE ARE ?

We are human right activist and simple citizens of Eritrean origin living in Germany. We do all we can to help get the world attention to the human right violations perpetrated by the Government of Eritrea against its own citizens inside Eritrea.

WHAT IS OUR MESSAGE ?

By doing this pacific march from Geneva to Rome which is about 1200 km and would take some 20 days of march by foot, we would like to speak on behalf of the voiceless Eritrean prisoners of conscience and prisoners of opinion detained incommunicado and now languishing in Eritrean prisons. Our message is best summarized by the phrase of the French philosopher and writer Montesquieu which goes as follows : "injustice done to one is a threat to all."

WHAT IS GOING ON INSIDE ERITREA ?

Several hundreds or even thousands of prisoners of conscience are imprisoned on account of their non-violent opinions, beliefs and criticisms of the government. Some of these prisoners had expressed their peaceful opinions openly or had published them in newspapers, while others were punished for speaking their views in private – or were merely suspected of holding anti-government views. Some former government ministers and journalists have been held since September 2001. A wide range of other people have been arrested since then.

There is virtually nothing acknowledged or admitted by the authorities about political prisoners and their conditions and treatment. Prisoners are detained in secret and many have "disappeared". Their whereabouts are not disclosed by the authorities to their families or anyone else. There is no legal process and indeed everything to do with this system of arbitrary detention is contrary to the law and the Constitution, as well as international standards.

The European parliament, the United States, Amnesty International, Reporters without borders, Human Rights Watch and many others published reports year after year on these gross human rights violations in Eritrea.

Amnesty International in its press release of 18 September 2003 et its 2004 report, mentioned the following :

Prisoners of conscience: There were scores of detentions of suspected government opponents who supported calls by dissidents for democratic reforms and of others who were suspected of supporting armed opposition groups. They were arrested and secretly detained without official acknowledgement, explanation, charge or trial.

Eleven former government and ruling party leaders remained in detention as prisoners of conscience since their arrest in September 2001. No information was disclosed or known about their whereabouts or condition. They included former Vice-President Mahmoud Ahmed Sheriffo, former Foreign Minister Haile Woldetsanae and former Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) intelligence chief Petros Solomon. Dozens of others also remained in incommunicado detention.

Journalists: Fifteen journalists of the private and state media remained in detention at the end of the year. Most were independent media journalists who had been detained in the September 2001 crack-down, when

the entire private media, which had reported on the calls for reform, was banned.

Long-term political prisoners: Hundreds or possibly thousands of government critics and opponents arrested during the first decade following independence in 1991, about whom information was difficult to obtain, were believed to be still detained in secret military and security detention centres around the country, although some had "disappeared" and were feared to have been extrajudicially executed.

Military conscripts: Conscriptation for national service continued, with very little demobilization since it began in 1994. National service regulations oblige all men and women aged between 18 and 40 to do six months' military training and 18 months' development service, often construction work, with further reservist obligations. Military service was extended indefinitely during and after the war with Ethiopia and many reservists were recalled. The right to conscientious objection is not recognized by the authorities. Conscripts accused of military offences were punished with torture and indefinite arbitrary detention.

Religious persecution : Between February and May, police cracked down on minority Christian churches, breaking into religious services and church premises, arresting and beating church members, and torturing them in military detention centres. Those who were liable for military service were conscripted and others were provisionally released after weeks in detention, with threats of severe reprisals if they continued their religious activities. Religions other than the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Catholic and Lutheran churches and Islam were banned in May 2002 and ordered to register with the new Department of Religious Affairs, but had been informally allowed to continue.

In August, over 200 teenage school students on a compulsory pre-conscriptation course at Sawa military camp were arrested for possessing bibles. Twenty-seven girls and 30 boys were held in metal shipping containers in harsh conditions. They were pressed to abandon their faith. At least 330 church members, including over 80 conscripts, were reportedly still detained in secret at the end of 2003. Muslims suspected of links with Sudan-based armed Islamist groups were also targeted for repression. Dozens of Qur'anic teachers and government schoolteachers arrested in Keren and other towns in 1994 remained in secret detention and appeared to be prisoners of conscience.

Torture and ill-treatment: Torture continued to be used against some political prisoners and as a standard military punishment. Army deserters and conscription evaders were tortured in military custody. They were beaten, tied hand and foot in painful positions and left in the sun for lengthy periods ("the helicopter" torture method), and suspended by ropes from the ceiling. Religious prisoners were held in Sawa and other military camps, beaten and forced to crawl on sharp stones. They were kept in overcrowded shipping containers in unventilated, hot and unhygienic conditions, and denied adequate food and medical treatment.

WHAT YOU CAN DO ?

Talk to your family, friends, journalists, and local officials about the human right violations in Eritrea. You can also write appeals to :

His Excellency Issayas Afewerki
President of the State of Eritrea
Office of the President
PO Box 257
Asmara, Eritrea

Telegrams : President Issayas Afewerki, Asmara, Eritrea

Minister of Justice :

Ms Fawzia Hashim
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
PO Box 241
Asmara, Eritrea

Telegrams : Minister of Justice, Asmara, Eritrea

Fax : +2911 126 422

Copies to :

Head of the police :

Brigadier Abraham Andom
Commissioner of Police
Ministry of Internal Affairs
PO Box 1223
Asmara, Eritrea

Department of religious affaires :

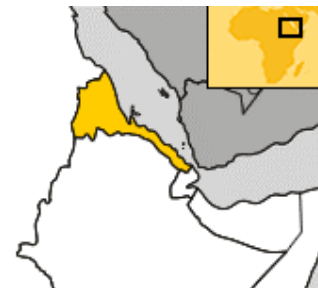
Mr Semere Beyene
Director, Department of Religious Affairs
Ministry of Local Government
PO Box 225
Asmara, Eritrea

Detailed documentation about the human right condition in Eritrea can be found at:

- Amnesty International:
Eritrea - 'You have no right to ask' Government resists scrutiny on Human rights
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAFR640032004>
- Human Rights Watch:
Eritrea
<http://www.hrw.org/wr2k3/africa4.html>
- Reporters Without Borders:
Eritrea - 2004 Annual Report
http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=10157
- US State Department:
Eritrea - International Religious Freedom Report 2004
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35354.htm>
Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2003
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27726.htm>

PACIFIC MARCH OF 1200 KM FROM GENEVA TO ROME

TO DENOUNCE GROSS VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN ERITREA



ERITREA

- Thousands opinion and conscience prisoners
- Entire private media banned
- All independent journalists under arrest
- Torture and ill treatment rampant
- No legal process, no rule of law
- Whereabouts of prisoners not disclosed to their families

