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St. Athanasius Charitable Society

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"Give them something to eat" - Matthew 14:16

Eritrea: Persecution Alert:

The Crisis in the Eritrean Orthodox Church Deepens

So much has happened since 2005 when the Government of Mr. Isaias Afewerki finally brought the Eritrean Orthodox Church (EOC) under its complete control. The church is being administered by a layman political appointee and cadre of the ruling party – the ruthless Yoftahe Demetros. Some of the most influential priests of the church have since been languishing in prison without ever appearing before a court of law or being allowed visitations by anyone. The campaign to purge the church of priests who show the slightest opposition to such government interference in the EOC has been draconian. In Asmara and its surrounding alone over 60 clergies have been put out of the church. The culminating act of the government's campaign to "purge" the church, however, was the deposing, subsequent imprisonment of its patriarch, Abune Antonios, and installing his replacement.

Nowhere has so strong an opposition taken place to what has occurred in the EOC than in the Diocese of North America. Since 2005, the Diocese has taken an unwavering public stand by denouncing the imprisonment of so many priests, and finally, the deposing of the Patriarch. It refused to recognize none other than Abune Antonios as the only canonically legitimate patriarch.

Absolute control being the intended outcome, in late 2005 the government dispatched Abba Sinoda, a newly appointed bishop, to reign in the Diocese at the behest of the regime. To this end, the entire propaganda machine of the Eritrean Embassy in Washington DC and chapters of the ruling regime in every major city in the US were mobilized. Priests and churches were being harassed and intimidated. But the Diocese withstood the onslaught. Thanks to www.Tewahdo.com, the Diocese's website, one could follow the acts of Abba Sinoda's shameless campaign to either bring individual churches under the control of the government or destroying them. Today, although the Diocese is thriving, it is sad to see several priests having buckled under the pressure and choosing to be run by the Eritrean Embassy in Washington, DC.

The opposition to Yoftahe and the government appointed "patriarch" is growing with each passing day. Within Eritrea, churches are simply refusing to even mention the name of the pretentious "patriarch" in their liturgy, while Abune Antonios has emerged as a symbol of heroic resistance among all Eritreans. His name has become synonymous with all the historic religious figures that chose to stand for truth and justice, even at great personal risk.

The EOC, under the control Mr. Isaias' pariah government, has become a pariah church as well. It is not recognized by and, therefore, has no communion with any of its sister Oriental Orthodox churches. In a thorough rebuff to him personally and to what he represents, Abba Sinoda, is not permitted to set foot in any of the other Orthodox churches. As evidenced by the most recent events in Milan, where the hierarchs of the Roman Catholic Church refused so much as offering a courtesy audience to the Yoftahe-Dioscours delegation touring Europe, the EOC's isolation has become absolute. The Eritrean people - from Europe to the US, from the humble churches in remote hamlets of Eritrea to the great monasteries – are showing heroic resistance to what has happened to their beloved church.

SACS is a Christian, human rights organization dedicated to advocating for those who are in chains for their faith and to become a voice for the voiceless in Eritrea. To read more, visit: www.InChainsForChrist.org
