

Becoming a Refugee for the Second Time

Department of Information and Culture

Eritrean People's Party

December 14, 2009

A large number of Eritreans who had been repatriated to Eritrea after independence under the tripartite agreement of 2000 reached between the governments of Sudan, Eritrean, and UNHCR are reported to have begun leaving the country and heading back to Sudan. These are Eritreans who are being forced to leave and become refugees for the second time in their lives due to the country's economic and social crisis, political repression, and lack of freedom.

These are Eritreans who had become refugees during the independence war, but paid heavy price and supported the independence cause of Eritrea with the hope that their return after independence would be a return to freedom. When the tripartite agreement was concluded, these refugees did not hesitate; went through the registration process, and did not waver over the repatriation program. They were eager to return home and participate in rebuilding their ruined country. But when they finally reached at their destination in Eritrea, all the conditions and terms of the reintegration program enumerated in the agreement were changed and in some cases they were annulled. The cash assistance provided by UNHCR to help them reestablish their lives never reached at their hands; rather it went to the regime's coffers. Food, healthcare, and other assistance provided by UNHCR and WFP were misused by the regime.

Furthermore, they were told they would be free to return and resettle in any part of Eritrea of their choice. But contrary to the tripartite agreement, the new repatriates were resettled against their will in places where they could not find health and education services. The reintegration process was rendered useless by the actions of the Isayas regime right from the start. The youth were immediately taken to serve in the national service before they had a chance to reestablish their lives and that of their families although they were promised they would have two years before they could join the national service. Throughout the period that followed their return, the reintegration program did not succeed; the livelihood of the returnees became worse than they thought: they say they were better off as refugees in Sudan than they are in Eritrea.

The failure of the reintegration program coupled with the repressive political system in the country, the impact of droughts and poverty in the country, and forced conscription into the national service, is forcing a large number of repatriates to leave Eritrea and head back to Sudan. And the return of this category of Eritreans to Sudan for the second time is adding a significant number to the already growing population of Eritrean refugees in Sudan.

Tired, frustrated, and unable to lead a normal life under the repressive regime of Isayas, this category of Eritreans are doing that no other Eritreans have done before: they are packing their belongings and heading back to Sudan in large groups in broad daylight while the PFDJ authorities are watching

the exodus in disbelief. Unable to stop such large wave of people, the PFDJ authorities have resorted to nothing, but to simply ask them to handover their Identity cards before they depart. The impact of such movement is big and wide to the extent that a number of villages are becoming part of it: Derisa, Adi Sheikh Galhu, Mogolo, Sabuniaye, Ankelit, Tebdia, and Gergef. As of this time, approximately, 250 families have left the country and arrived in Sudan after turning in their Identity cards to the Army stationed at Hamid Denbai village.

As we just indicated, the country's repressive political system, drought and poverty is forcing hundreds of Eritreans to leave their country. The number of daily Eritrean arrivals in Sudan in addition to the group who are entering Sudan for the second time as refugees is expected to increase in the coming few months. Peter de Clercq, UNHCR representative in Sudan said, "There are very clear indications both in Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as in eastern Sudan that this will be a very bad season ... if drought does hit those regions, the numbers of Ethiopians and Eritreans coming into Sudan in the next few months could be as high as "tens of thousands of people" (IRIN December 3, 2009). Although drought and poverty is a factor, the political repression, misguided economic policy, and lack of freedom have been the root cause for hundreds and hundreds of Eritrean to leave their country.