

Eritreans Staged Demonstration in London, Great Britain

**Department of Information and Culture
Eritrean People's Party
February 23, 2009**

Scores of Eritreans residing in Great Britain staged demonstration in London on 22 February 2009, in protest against the massive human rights violations by the dictatorial regime of Isayas in the state of Eritrea. The demonstrators called for justice, peace, democracy, and rule of law in Eritrea.

The crowd of demonstrators rallied in front of the British foreign ministry building, chanting and waving banners "release prisoners of conscience, establish constitutional government, protect freedom of press, and stop killing Eritrean youth, yes to democracy, no to dictatorship ... etc!"

At the end of the rally, the demonstrators who came together from different parts of Great Britain to show their strong opposition against the human rights violations in Eritrea submitted a written memorandum to the office of British foreign ministry, explaining the goal and the message of the demonstration. Eritrean People's Party has translated the English text of the memorandum into Tigrinya and Arabic for our readers.

22 February 2009

The Hon. David Miliband MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, UK
King Charles Street,
London SW1 A 2AH

Dear Sir,

As British citizens of Eritrean origin, members and supporters of Eritrean political and civic organizations struggling for democracy and justice in Eritrea, we are alarmed by the increasing human rights abuses that continue to take place in Eritrea.

We have organised today's demonstration in order to highlight the plight of the Eritrean people and asking for stronger actions against the Eritrean government who is violating even the most basic human rights and subjecting its citizens to unimaginable atrocities; torture, disappearances and killing, as well as irresponsible foreign policy leading to the isolation of our country of origin from the rest of the world.

As you may know, the Eritrean government's autocratic demeanour is continuing unabated as if the country is not part of the international community. The problems are being highlighted by various institutions that advocate for human rights; Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders have produced numerous documents regarding the abuses that are taking place in Eritrea.

There are also numerous other indications that signal the magnitude of the problem faced by Eritreans today. The increasing number of people fleeing the country and seeking refuge elsewhere is one such phenomenon that has repeatedly made headlines in neighbouring countries as well as in southern Europe and even here in the UK. Home office figures indicate a sharp rise in the number of Eritrean asylum seekers, consistently placing Eritrea, in the top refugee producing countries only being surpassed by countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

The magnitude of the problems leading to the thousands of young people fleeing the country becomes apparent when it is reflected against its context where, the ruling party in Asmara has issued a shoot to kill policy against anyone found crossing any of the country's borders without permission. As a result of this policy many have become victims of summary shootings by government troops whilst fleeing to Sudan or Ethiopia. Earlier this month reports of the killing of four innocent teenagers in the Mid Mereb basin reached Diaspora communities across the globe as families and friends of the victims were informed of the tragic deaths from a witness who survived the atrocity hiding among the corpses of his friends.

It is despite this policy and its barbaric implementation that young people are fleeing the country in their droves only to be faced with more hazardous situation across the Sahara and through the Mediterranean into Europe, where they are more often than not unsuccessful in their bid for asylum. The number of young people fleeing Eritrea and the risk that they are prepared to take to flee the country is a testament to the magnitude of bad governance in Eritrea.

Dear Sir,

Despite this extensively reported (and in many cases self evident) poor human rights records of many leaders, we feel they are not being effectively reminded of their obligations under international human right agreements. We believe President Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea is one of those leaders who should be required to account for his irresponsible governance and particularly for his abject rejection of conventions that Eritrea is a party to.

In Eritrea today, opposing the government is tantamount to treason and those who express their views openly are detained indefinitely. Many citizens are extra judicially incarcerated incommunicado for many years, the case of ministers and top government officials since September 2001 is one example of many such situations. The arrest of many religious leaders and thousands of adherents of minority religious groups is another. The independent press has been silenced and the journalists put behind bars since 2001. The people do not have a say in the way the country is governed and the country is without any Constitution. Abuse of power is rampant and there is no accountability for any action taken by the government or high-ranking government officials. Hunger and starvation is now becoming commonplace in the country and despite the self evident increase of beggars in the streets, the government is not willing to receive food aid or indeed acknowledge its existence.

We are aware that Her Majesty's Government, in conjunction with its European Union partners, has been exerting pressure on the Eritrean government to rectify the situation. However, the Eritrean government has persistently ignored such calls from the international community. We believe that it is now time to send unequivocal message calling for the restoration of democracy and justice in Eritrea.

We, therefore, urge Her Majesty's Government to take the lead by:

Providing newly arriving Eritrean asylum seekers the protection that they need.
Not forcibly deporting any Eritreans back to Eritrea, where they would be treated as absconders from the military service in detention camps where torture and inhuman and degrading treatment is the norm.

Increasing the pressure on the Eritrean government by means of targeted travel bans of the high ranking government and party officials;
Calling for the immediate release of all political and religious prisoners.
Calling for the establishment of a genuine, all inclusive democratic government, that respects all the basic freedoms of worship, association and speech.
Blocking the European Commission's plan to give Eritrea over €120 million development aid until there is tangible improvement of the human rights situation as stipulated in the Cotonou Agreement, which the Commission is not adhering to.
Exposing the hidden hunger that is affecting increasing number of Eritreans; and
Supporting the Eritrean People and the Eritrean civic and opposition groups in Diaspora by engaging with them on policy and humanitarian issues affecting Eritrea and by helping their human resource development.

We thank you for taking the time to consider our plea and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Asefaw G/kidan

Campaign Organiser

EHDR – UK Board member.