

Liberty

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Eritrean People's Democratic Party - EPDP*

ERITREA REFUSES TO CHANGE; FRUSTRATES THE UN SYSTEM

It is seven years since the UN system seriously started to help in changing an ever deteriorating political and human rights situation in Eritrea. It failed. It also discovered belatedly that the Eritrean

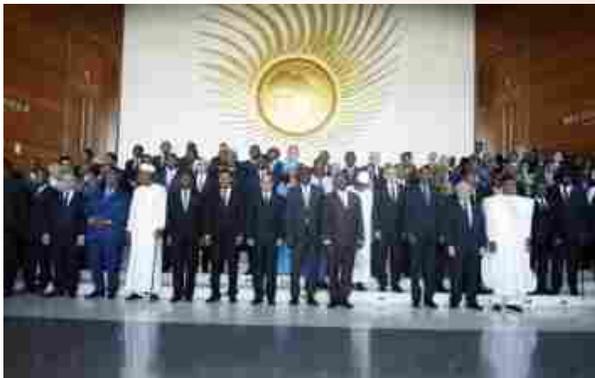


autocrat and a handful of his henchmen are not willing to change, come what may! The UN Special Rapporteur for Eritrea, Daniela Kravetz told the UN Human Rights Council on 26 February that Eritrea failed to show improvement at least in five selected areas. The next day on 27 February, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,



Michelle Bachelet, told the Council that Eritrea failed to respond to her Office's offer to help in three key areas for support. See p. 3

AFRICAN SUMMIT REMINDED: ERITREA NOT OK



EPDP Chairman Tesfai Woldemichael (Degiga) told African leaders at their 33rd summit in Addis Ababa that the decades long bad situation in Eritrea deserves their kind attention. See p. 2

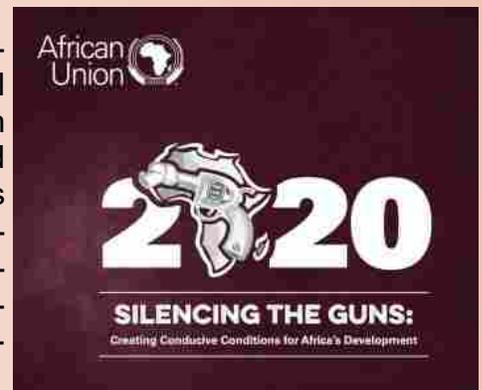


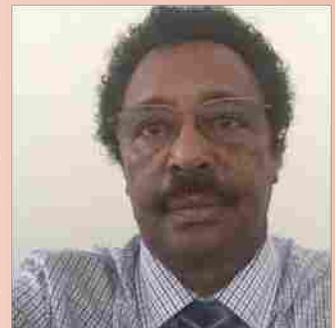
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EPDP CHAIRMAN TELLS 33RD AU SUMMIT THAT ERITREANS DESERVE AFRICA’S ATTENTION

In his timely message of 9 February 2020 to the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, EPDP Chairman Tesfai Woldemichael (Degiga) once more told African leaders that Eritrea and its people deserve their most urgent attention because the country is “a smoldering fire” that can go ablaze anytime soon.

“This is an Eritrean SOS message, an alarm call to Africa”, the EPDP Chair added. The two-day 33rd Session of the Assembly of the AU was convened under the theme of “**Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa’s Development**” and the EPDP Chairman described the slogan as “a very much relevant to the Eritrean condition.” Addressed to the AU Commission Chairman, Mr. Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, and copied to delegations of African leaders attending the Summit, the message listed the following facts to the attention of the AU:



- ⇒ That the Ethio-Eritrean border issue that cost 100,000 lives is NOT yet resolved;
- ⇒ That the two-decade long phase of no-peace-no-war is NOT yet over in Eritrea after having caused massive suffering to the people;
- ⇒ That Eritreans at home and in exile are bitterly unhappy; and
- ⇒ That the AU Summit should guess the consequence of this situation in a highly militarized society in which a huge percentage of the population knows how to handle guns.

The message asked Africa to commit itself in helping the implementation of the final and binding ruling on the border, and make on the Asmara regime to implement the resolutions and recommendations of the UN system.

ERITREA FRUSTRATES THE UN SYTEM

UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights on Eritrea, Ms Daniela Kravetz, told the 43rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council on 26 February 2020 that Eritrea is refusing to make any progress whatsoever in basic human rights of its own people.



The fact that thousands of Eritreans are fleeing their country is a “telling sign of no progress” in the political and human rights situation in the country, she explained.

Since receiving the mandate in 2018, she submitted five benchmarks that Eritrea could start making progress. These included:

- ◆ **Showing progress in rule of law**
- ◆ **Making reform on the national service**
- ◆ **Progress in promoting civil liberties**
- ◆ **Progress in women’s rights and gender equality, and**
- ◆ **Improving operating environment for international agencies in Eritrea.**

Ms Kravetz’s oral report underlined that Eritrea failed to make any progress even in these few starting benchmarks. The Asmara authorities also continued to refuse her a single visit to Eritrea as they did for six years to the previous UN Special Rapporteur, Ms Sheila Keetharuth.

She also reported that the Eritrean regime is continuing its persecution of all faiths in Eritrea and confiscating their schools and health facilities. (See full report on the interactive dialogue that followed her presentation: <http://webtv.un.org/live/watch/id-sr-on-human-rights-in-eritrea-9th-meeting-43rd-regular-session-human-rights-council/6136241213001/?term=>)

Twenty-one delegations of member states and four international NGOs made interventions at the interactive dialogue on Eritrea. The European Union and many other speakers saw “no sign of change” in the behavior of the Eritrean regime; Australia regretted that none of the 131 recommendations Eritrea promised to work on have been given a try; Vatican asked for dialogue with Eritrea and hoped the regime would stop the war against charities and Germany saw civil space continually narrowing in Eritrea.

A number of speakers expressed their conviction that the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights for Eritrea is already a given fact.

Eritrea’s envoy, the usual Tesfamichael Gerhatu, presented his usual words of denial and was supported by the delegates of Venezuela, Cuba, Russia and China.

Ms Kravetz will present her full written report at the upcoming 44th Session of the Council in June this year which is expected review her mandate and hopefully extend it for the 8th year and until the situation is changed in Eritrea.

UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTS ERITREA'S REFUSAL OF UN HELP



In her address to the UN Human Rights Council on 27 February, Ms Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, exposed Eritrean regime's refusal of help from her Office. In response, the regime envoy, Tesfamichael Gerhatu, said his government deserved not blame but praise for the progress it made in giving "a dignified life" to its people. He accused the UN official of depicting "fake crisis" about Eritrea instead of reflecting on "Eritrea's progress in promoting equal rights and opportunities" to its people.

This was the second day that Eritrea was widely debated at the 43rd Session of the Council with long list of speakers expressing deep concern about the continued failure of Eritrea to start changing to the better. The High Commissioners address was on a number of problem countries like Eritrea, Syria, Iran, Yemen, Venezuela and a few others.

She said despite the peace accord with Ethiopia and other opportunities opened to Eritrea, the civic space remains "entirely under Government control, and rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and belief, as well as freedom of the press, are largely denied." She also regretted about Eritrea's failure to respond to her Office's offer for assistance in strengthening the judiciary, rights of persons with disabilities, and rights to water and sanitation. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights also went on stating as follows:

"I am troubled by crackdowns on people who express even implicit criticism of the Government. For example, after Catholic bishops released a pastoral letter obliquely calling for justice and reform, 21 Catholic-run hospitals were reportedly closed down. We have also received repeated reports of arrests and detention of people for practicing their religious beliefs.

"The Government has continued to arrest scores of Eritreans for exercising their fundamental rights to the freedoms of opinion, belief and peaceful assembly, detaining many without trial, in sub-standard conditions, and often incommunicado.

"Eritrea should ensure that persons in detention are treated with humanity and dignity; release those subjected to arbitrary detention; enable fair trial guarantees; and clarify the fate or whereabouts of disappeared persons. I join the Human Rights Committee in its concern about widespread impunity regarding serious human rights violations.

"The indefinite duration and harsh conditions of military service are one of the main factors pushing many young Eritreans to leave the country. Reports indicate that some conscripts are used as unpaid or ill-paid labour. The Government has stated that reforms of conscription are planned, but no practical measures have been taken to date."

NY TIMES EXPOSES EU'S RECKLESS FUNDING OF SLAVE-LABOR IN ERITREA

Thanks to the New York Times, the world was made aware in January 2020 what Eritreans always knew: that the European Union was funding forced-labour projects of the rogue regime in Asmara.

As part of its aim to stop the flow of migrants from Eritrea, the EU funded a road project in Eritrea in 2019 at the cost of 20 million Euros and last December decided to grant 95 million more to the Eritrean regime. It could not of course fail to know that those projects employ Eritrea's forced conscripts described by the UN as slave-like labour.



NYT journalist Martina Stevis-Grindneff wrote that the previous grant “caused outrage in human-rights circles,” but the EU cared less and went on with its December decision.

The writer sensed unease at EU headquarters in Brussels about the counterproductive execution of the project that “tarnished” the EU aim to “address the root causes of migration.”

Because of the well known domestic situation, the flow of asylum seekers out of Eritrea remains consistently high but the EU continues funding “irrespective of the outcome”.



But the agency does not have an office in Eritrea and says it is checking on the project through visits organized by the Eritrean government.

In response to questions by the NYT writer, the EU implementing agency said that it was not monitoring the work but that the Eritrean government was “monitoring itself.”

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Asked how many conscripts worked on the project and what their salaries were, the agency said it did “not have access to this information.”

European officials and migration experts believe that Eritreans will continue to leave their country in the thousands until, of course, the root cause of their flight is addressed.

Will China Replace UAE at Assab?

Under its autocrat president, Isaias Afewerki, Eritrea has been on auction for literal sale to the highest bidder for quite a long time now. Rogue states like Iran and several nameless extremist non-state actors in the region have used Eritrea for their own ends and to the detriment of the Eritrean people. A clear example is the condition of the Eritrean port of Assab which at least until now is in the hands of the UAE.

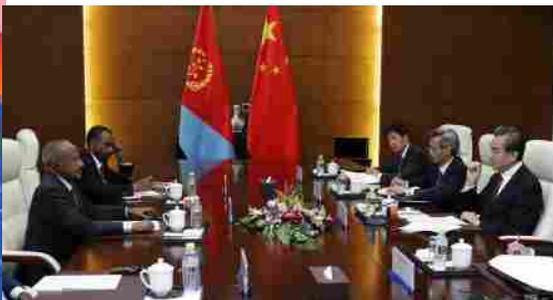


UAE Air and Naval Bases located at the Eritrean Port of Assab

This rich Gulf state runs an air force and naval base at Assab. The Eritrean people don't know whether the port is rented for unknown years or "sold" to that Gulf state and its close friends.

In late January 2020, journalist Austin Bodetti writing for the digital publication *The Diplomat* noted that also China is courting the Eritrean regime to gain "a grip on the Red Sea" and make it centerpiece of its megaproject of a new Silk Road.

Eritrea has long expressed its enthusiasm for the Belt and Road Initiative, China's bid to expand its sphere of influence by investing in countries across the Global South. The *Diplomat* magazine further exposed that Eritrean delegations to China have been trekking to China frequently ever since Eritrea's attendance at the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in 2017. He said Chinese President Xi Jinping likely sees his invest-



ment in Eritrea as an opportunity to secure an ally on the Red Sea because President Xi is more than willing to ignore Isaias Afwerki's well-known abuses of human rights, such as conscripting tens of thousands of Eritreans and forcing them into what the United Nations terms "slave-like" labor. As long as China keeps overlooking Eritrea's dismal record on human rights, the two countries' relationship seems likely to blossom. The journalist believed that for now, China has one opponent in the race to establish a sphere of influence in Eritrea: the United Arab Emirates.

But, taking into consideration China's resources and power, it is not difficult to guess as who of the two "competitors" will win to have real hold over Assab and later Massawa.

ERITREAN CONFERENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CHANGE ENTERING A PROMISING PHASE?

Diaspora Eritreans engaged in the struggle for change and democracy have been holding numerous conferences in the past several years talking on what can be done to help change the sad situation in their country of origin. Unfortunately, most of those conferences and symposia remained simple 'talking shops' and without follow-up and traceable results. A good example is an agreement reached by a group of political civil organizations that met between 22-23 June 2019 in Minnesota, USA. Their declaration stated as follows:

- 1. We will work together and coordinate efforts to defeat the dictatorial regime and bring about democratic change in Eritrea;**
- 2. We will take positive actions to support each other in areas of common national interest;**
- 3. We will strive to coordinate our diplomatic activities;**
- 4. We will work in coordination or coalition among each other towards creating a unified Eritrean opposition movement, including all peoples' movements in and outside of Eritrea;**
- 5. We support good neighborly relationships with all of Eritrea's neighbors, however we condemn all forms of agreements that the morally and legally illegitimate dictatorial regime of Eritrea enters with any foreign government or entity since such agreements violate the sovereignty of the people of Eritrea;**
- 6. We believe that the Eritrean defense and security forces are part of the oppressed masses of Eritrean society and we call on them to stand with their people and be an instrument in charting the democratic change;**
- 7. We recognize that a transition from a dictatorial regime to a democratic government is both difficult and critical, thus, we agree to work earnestly in the development and application of a common transitional charter;**
- 8. We agree to create an implementation forum consisting of representatives from each of the signatures; and**
- 9. We invite other political parties, civic organizations, and study groups to affirm this resolution and participate [or assist] in the implementation forum.**

However, many optimistic observers feel that 2020 shall be different: the general frustration that gave birth to the Yiakil/Enough Movement is being reviewed at recent gatherings that promise good results. One can cite two recent examples of the new resolve to do what has to be done now and before it gets too late for the country they love.

Eritrean Women's Conference in DC

On 8 February 2020, a large number of Eritrean women gathered in Washington DC with aim of NOT only to recall to memory some of the limitless damages inflicted upon the Eritrean society, women in particular, BUT also to discuss and agree on what can be done to remedy them all in the future. In fact, this exemplary DC conference laid out the blueprint of what women can do in the common struggle for political change in Eritrea and play some significant role in its time-taking women's emancipation.



EPDP Central Council member Asghedet Mehreteab was one of the keynote speakers whose powerful message was a good reflection on the lofty aim of the conference and the determination of Eritrean women to do what they can within 2020. High expectations now are



that Eritreans will soon see the birth of a national organization for women whose objectives go beyond the fall of the current dictatorship in Eritrea.

Frankfurt Accord of Branches of 14 Political Bodies

On 22-23 February, another promising event took place in Frankfurt: representatives of branches of 14 Eritrean political bodies agreed to work together as one body within Germany.



As of 2020, these organizations will jointly plan and execute political activities. The joint activities could include holding of public meetings, jointly celebrating national events and holding annual festivals.

In connection to these political organizations, another related development appears to be in the making. An interested Eritrean civic society is reportedly inviting the political organizations to hold a two-day meeting in London during March 2020 to seriously discuss the formation of a platform for joint work. The five political bodies expected to take part at the upcoming conference are:

1. The Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change (ENCDC—a coalition of 18)
2. The Eritrean National Front (ENF— a coalition of four)
3. The Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP)
4. United Eritreans for Justice (UEJ).
5. Unity for Democratic Change (UDC)

UNICEF: Eritrean Children Are The Most Mal- nourished in Africa

Persistent UNICEF reports for over a decade now classify that over 60% of Eritrean children under 5 are “stunted, wasted or underweight.”

This situation, which very close to starvation, was the case also in 2019. But the callous Eritrean regime cares less.

