

Liberty

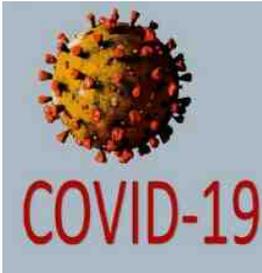
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IN REPUBLICS OF FEAR, RUMOURS 'KILL' LEADERS



Once again these last few weeks, rumour mills “killed” both the dictators in Eritrea and its type in everything evil, N. Korea. Their peoples heartily wished they were dead. But, as always, no one knew what really happened inside those two republics of fear until the rumours disappeared in the thin air. In N. Korea, people speculated of something wrong occurring to Kim Jung-Un while in a surgery. The version of rumour that “disabled or killed” the Eritrean dictator involved kind of a stroke. Whatever the source of the rumour, almost all Eritreans intensively prayed in recent weeks not only a safe escape from the deadly Coronavirus but also to finally learn that the rumour about the death of Isaias this time round is true for them to say ...Ufff Temesghen, Alhamdulillah...Unfortunately, we are not there yet...(See p.3)



Eritrean Political Opposition Asks Global Action in Fighting Covid-19

The Eritrean political opposition organizations in exile urged WHO, UNHCR and the rest of the international humanitarian community as well as their own compatriots to make maximum preparations to fight the corona-virus pandemic which can affect more Eritreans than others because of the absence of a responsible government in Eritrea caring for the people. (See p. 6)



ENCDC



ENF



EPDP



UEJ



UDC



RSADO

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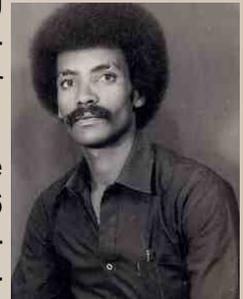
AMNESTY'S REPORT ON ARBITRARY

ARRESTS, DISAPPEARANCE IN ERITREA

For decades at end, the political and human rights situation in Eritrea continues to be bad and unchanged. Take any report of any year by any human rights body during the last quarter of a century, and the language is same: telling a dim story of political and human rights condition. Kidnapings, arbitrary arrests, disappearances run unabated for decades.



Just to give an example, two top leadership members of the liberation struggle were kidnapped from the Sudan on 26 April 1992. For the last 28 years, no one knows what happened to Woldemariam Bahlibi and Teklebrhan Ghebre-Tsadiq after they were seen in the hands of Eritrean secu-



ity agents in Tessenei a few days after they were kidnapped from a friend's home in Kassala. To have a quick picture of the Eritrean situation under the current dictatorship, read this section of the 2019 annual report of Amnesty International on two aspects of the ongoing political and human rights abuses in Eritrea.

Arbitrary Arrests and Enforced Disappearances: “Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances continued, for which security forces were not held accountable. Hundreds of prisoners of conscience and other prisoners, including journalists, former politicians and practitioners of unauthorized religions, continued to be arbitrarily detained without charge or access to lawyers or family members, many of whom had been held for nearly two decades. The whereabouts and fate of 11 politicians and 17 journalists, arrested and detained 18 years ago, for criticizing the President's rule, remained unknown.

“Berhane Abrehe, a former finance minister, who was arrested by security forces in the capital, Asmara, in September 2018, had not been seen until April 2019 according to his son. He was arrested just days after he published a book called Eritrea My Country which criticized the government and called on Eritreans to use peaceful means to bring about democracy. After his arrest, the authorities refused to disclose information as to his whereabouts or fate.”

UNREALIZED DAILY WISHES OF A NATION

For 30 years between 1961 and 1991, the daily dream of Eritreans was to get rid of the cruelties of the Ethiopian annexation army. Again for nearly 30 years since independence, this same people unfortunately continued to suffer and dream of getting rid of a regime that denied them their long-deferred aspirations for peace, justice, rule of law and prosperity under a democratic system of governance.

Under both situations, uphill struggles and sacrifices were continued although during the first few years of the post-independence phase, Eritreans were divided in two camps – those who supported the regime and those who opposed it.



However, following the border war with Ethiopia, only very few people remained in support of the regime. With the aim of proving the rumours to be false, the Eritrean dictator appeared on the TV to talk much belatedly about the coronavirus pandemic. But his weakened physic and changed body language only sharpened the rumor machine.



During the last two weeks of April, almost 100% of Eritreans at home and in diaspora wished and waited to hear a good news of riddance from his presence. But as the case has been both from Eritrea and its ilk in the Far East, there was no possibility of obtaining a reliable source to know the truth.

The only written pieces of sketchy information appeared in the Eritrea Hub of Martin Plaut, a South African journalist keenly following developments in Eritrea and the Horn of Africa region. Still, his 26 April posting could only say that “rumours were rife” in Eritrea and among Eritreans in exile. But on 29 April, he quoted reliable source that had seen the dictator near the dam of Adi Hallo whose construction he has been “supervising” for several years. Other sources from inside Eritrea were also quoted by Plaut confirming that the man indeed suffered a mild stroke early in April for which he went to Saudi Arabia. If that was true, he is now said to be back to his hiding place at Adi Hallo until the next rumor “kills” him or until he is visited by the real death itself.

FEARS OF EXTERNAL INTERVENTIONS

Amid the rumors about the fate of the Eritrean dictator, some Ethiopian social media commentators welcomed what they called a secret agreement reached, through Saudi mediation, between the Eritrean and Ethiopian leaders to allow Ethiopia’s unlimited use of Assab, almost meaning its virtual annexation, for a 30-year period.

This appears to match with the recent language of the two leaders about the use of Assab and the treacherous “mandate” Isaias Afeworki unashamedly offered to the Ethiopian Prime Minister to represent him in future Ethio-Eritrean affairs.



Equally disturbing to Eritreans is the growing influence of the dictator's son, Abraham Afeworki, and the fear of preparing this young man to replace his father when anything happens to the dictator. A good number of other observers opine that Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Ethiopia could find their best interests served by supporting this succession project in post-Isaias Eritrea. If these projects come true, the suffering of the Eritrean people could be extended for more difficult decades in this century. God forbid!

GERMANY: ERITREA NOT WORTHY OF SUPPORT

On 30 April 2020, Eritrean regime itself reported it was told to be not worthy of support while Ethiopia happily announced its obtaining a hefty grant of \$441 million from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

At its 22 April deliberations, the German Parliamentary Committee on Development Cooperation concluded that Eritrea “does not meet the requirements for bilateral Cooperation due to its serious human rights violations.”

This has been the position of the German Government that stood opposed to EU Commission's wrong approach of assisting the regime in Asmara. For instance, the German Parliamentary Committee issued a strong statement last February 18 advising the EU Commission to correct its undeserved support to facilitate “an abusive system of forced labour” in Eritrea. Below are excerpts from that statement:

“Eritreans deserve to be free and to have their basic rights respected, including to have an adequate standard of living and a family life, and the right to not be arbitrarily detained. At a time where Eritrean leaders have gained international recognition without having improved the plight of their citizens, the EU needs to make clear through its support that ordinary Eritreans are not forgotten.

“Eighteen months after the peace deal [with Ethiopia], hopes of improvement in Eritrea have been dashed...What is clear is that any engagement with Eritrea risks bringing the European Commission into a minefield of human rights issues – in some sectors more than others.

“So far, the government has shown no interest in creating a civilian service system outside of the national service system. The government uses many other tools to repress its' citizens basic rights...Citizens cannot express their views or question government policies affecting them. There is no independent civil society in the country. Independent media outlets inside Eritrea have been shut down since 2001...The government has neither released nor improved the conditions of its most prominent prisoners...Despite this reality, it appears that the EU has chosen to accept the risk of indirectly supporting forced labor by engaging in a construction project – one of the most abusive sectors – and accepting that not even the most basic checks and balances are in place.

“The EU should do better. Measures should be put in place to ensure that EU funding and other activities do not contribute to the abusive system of forced labor in Eritrea...[see] concrete evidence that the government is truly working towards ending the repressive use of national service, including by creating jobs outside of national service, by separating schooling from conscription, and by immediately demobilizing individuals who have spent more than five years in service.”

ERITREA IGNORES CALLS TO FREE PRISONERS TO REDUCE COVID-19 RISKS

Holding the infamy of having a record high number of prisons and detention ‘containers’ and centers throughout the land, Eritrea is being urged to free at least some of its tens of thousands of prisoners. But the regime is, as usual, ignoring such earnest requests to be humane in the face of the current killing pandemic.

Daniela Kravetz, the UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in Eritrea, was among those asking the Asmara authorities to release prisoners from its “crowded jails” spread all over the country.



“I call on the Eritrean authorities to immediately and unconditionally release those detained without legal basis, including all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, and to adopt urgent measures to reduce the number of people in detention to prevent the spread of COVID-19,” the Special Rapporteur stated in her

early April message of plea to the callous Eritrean regime.



“Over the years, many have died in Eritrean prisons due to malnutrition, lack of basic healthcare and ill-treatment. Essential medical care services are often unavailable for detainees,” Ms Kravetz said adding: “The pandemic could have devastating consequences for the prison population in Eritrea due to the fragile healthcare services, unhygienic conditions, and overcrowding.”

She said that some of the many political prisoners and prisoners of conscience being held in Eritrea had been behind bars for decades because of their political views or their faith. In 2019 alone, more than 200 individuals were imprisoned because of their faith. “I also call upon the Eritrean authorities to respect the rule of law and protect human rights in the implementation of their measures to respond to the outbreak of COVID-19,” the UN Special Rapporteur said in her message that drew no attention from the authorities in Eritrea.

To make things much worse to the Eritrean people, the Asmara regime refused to accept an offer of anti-infection supplies against the pandemic from the Chinese billionaire Jack Ma and his Alibaba foundation for no conceivable reason.

On their part, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch issued statements asking the Eritrean authorities to release prisoners at this critical time to humanity.

The UN Special Rapporteur, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other agencies joined in calling for the release of many vulnerable prisoners, including the 23-year old Ciham Ali Abdu who was detained at the age of 15 simply for being a daughter of a former minister and for having tried to flee the country.



Eritrean Opposition Camp Calls for Global Support in Fighting Covid-19

On 31 March 2020, the entire ensemble of Eritrean political forces in exile have issued joint statements to the international humanitarian community and their own compatriots at home and in exile to make an extraordinarily especial preparation and concrete action to fight the fast looming dangers of the corona-virus pandemic which can harm more Eritreans than others because of the sad situation of Eritrea and its people.

Both joint messages were from the Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change (ENCDC); the Eritrean National Front (ENF); the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP); the Organization of Unity for Democratic Change (UDC); United Eritreans for Justice (UEJ) and the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO), all in exile because political organizations are not allowed to function inside Eritrea.

Appeal to the World Community:

The Eritrean appeal to the world humanitarian community urging for “seriously look at the precarious situation” in Eritrea was addressed to the UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi and the WHO Director General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, with copies to other humanitarian bodies and Governments hosting Eritrean refugees, on top of them the Sudan, Ethiopia and Israel.

The appeal reminded the global community that the situation in Eritrea should concern everybody because Eritrea is now a place where “local community structures, charities and long-established religious support institutions and other societal safety networks have been systematically demolished and exist no more.”

Message to the Eritrean People:



Asmara without water amid Covid-19

Their other message of 1 April, prepared both in Arabic and Tigrigna, was a direct address to every Eritrean to do all what is possible to save many Eritrean lives, especially at home and at the refugee camps.

After giving guidelines for prevention and also extensive background on the current pandemic and its potential danger to Eritreans in congested prisons, concentration centers of conscripts and refugee camps in the neighboring countries, the message to the Eritrean people included calls for joint action to help health workers in Eritrea and promote awareness about the pandemic in cooperation with Eritrean health experts in diaspora.

Also the Eritrean people and the armed forces to ask the Eritrean authorities to use the millions obtained from the sale of minerals, use of ports and “donations” from the Arab states in the current fight against the coronavirus.

The message also included these calls:

1. Every Eritrean conduct activities that can help vulnerable Eritreans from being harmed by the pandemic,
2. The be watchful against the known deceptive voices campaigning for funds;
3. To earnestly appeal to friendly peoples and forces in the world to make pressure bear on Eritrean authorities to free prisoners and release conscripts in the “national service”;
4. The Eritrean people and the armed forces to jointly demand for the denied right of drawing more than 5,000 Nacfa (c.\$300) per month from the Eritrean banks;

Printed below is the full text of the appeal of Eritrean political forces to the international humanitarian community:

An Appeal for Protection of Eritreans at Home and abroad from the Scourges of Corona virus

Dear UNHCR Commissioner, Mr. Filippo Grandi,
Dear WHO DG, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus,

We, the undersigned entities representing the ensemble of Eritrean political organizations in exile, felt the obligation of sending this earnest appeal to Your Excellencies at UNHCR and WHO, with copies to concerned UN organs and countries hosting Eritrean refugees, on top of them Sudan, Ethiopia, Yemen, Israel and Libya, in order to draw the attention of the international humanitarian community to the plight of Eritreans in many countries of the world.

We are deeply concerned, Sirs, that the pandemic caused by COVID-19 has now reached our ill



prepared country and the countries in the region that provide shelter to most of the Eritrean refugees in one of world’s most conflict ridden and sensitive regions. We are worried that, given the situation where many of our people lack access to hand washing facilities and detergents - the most effective preventive treatment, the pandemic would leave an even bigger number of people killed and cause more societal disruption than in any other country in the

world. For that we need the timely and immediate attention and support of the international community led by appropriate initiatives from your esteemed organizations, the UNHCR and WHO.

We believe you are well aware of the problems in Eritrea where young people flee the country in thousands leaving the old and vulnerable at home. Local community structures, charities and long-established religious support institutions and other societal safety networks have been systematically demolished and exist no more. Most of the UN humanitarian organizations and International NGOs have not been active in Eritrea for decades.



Refugees in N. Ethiopia are exposed to the pandemic

Excellencies,

The general public in today's Eritrea is left pauperized and helpless. The reported over 300 dungeons in the country where thousands of political prisoners languish under inhuman conditions are congested and poorly equipped to handle the current pandemic. Divisions of the Eritrea's huge army of conscripts and "national service" forced-labor workers living in overcrowded camps will be an easy prey to the pandemic.

On the other hand, Eritrean refugees in camps and urban concentrations in Sudan, Ethiopia, Yemen and Israel are likely to be ravaged by this pandemic without an effective intervention of international humanitarian actors. Eritrean refugees in reception camps and temporary shelters in many countries, including in many European countries, shall be exposed to danger unless the host countries are advised and supported by concerned bodies, especially the UNHCR and WHO.

We, therefore, strongly appeal for your most urgent measures that could prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Eritrea, and in particular in the refugee camps and urban concentration of Eritreans in several countries, especially in Africa. Needless to say, the topmost priorities of action will include:

- > Making sure that health clinics in those areas have access to adequate supply of water, detergents, disinfection liquids, gloves, masks and napkins;
- > Looking to it that local health centers and agencies have check-up facilities for timely identification of persons infected with the vicious corona virus;
- > The international humanitarian community to do what it takes to help people inside Eritrea from the scourges of this pandemic.

Dear Sirs,

We very much feel that you understand the essence of this modest call to you to seriously look at the precarious situation of the estimated four million Eritreans at home and about two million Eritreans in the diaspora who are exposed to the looming danger facing our world today.

Sincerely yours,

(Signatories) Chairpersons of

Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change (ENCDC); Eritrean National Front (ENF); Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP); Organization Unity for Democratic Change (UDC); United Eritreans for Justice (UEJ), and the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO).



140 Parties in Progressive Alliance Call for Global Action to Fight the Consequences of Covid-19

The EPDP was among the 140 member parties of the social democratic, socialist and progressive parties in the Progressive Alliance in approving and releasing in April a statement for concerted action to fight the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. The statement calls upon all democratic forces to play a leading role in shaping a new World Order in the aftermath of this pandemic.

The widely distributed PA statement also calls for the creation of an international fund under the UN to support the treatment of coronavirus patients worldwide to tackle its long-term consequences. It underlined the important of giving due attention to peoples that cannot expect "financial support nor medical protection from their governments."

The statement adds: "Immediate medical support needed for refugee camps in preparation for the spread of the viral disease. Refugees and displaced persons are most vulnerable and must not be forgotten. International institutions and states must continue and even increase their aid and assistance."

EPDP ORGANS IN ACTION AMIDST COVID-19 PANDEMIC

With the coronavirus overtaking everyone's attention all over the globe, the rank and file of the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP) had to slow down its operations that required travel and person-to-person contact. However, during the past two months, the leadership, the zonal coordinators and party branch leaders did all they could to continue the EPDP in action via the electronic media, as briefly reported below.



Executive Committee Holds 3rd Regular Meeting

The EPDP Chairman, Tesfai Woldemichael (Degiga) on 25 April led a very important meeting of the Executive Committee that reviewed party performances during the past four months and the general situation affecting Eritreans everywhere, especially in relation to the deadly coronavirus. Guidelines were adopted to help party members effectively participate in the fight of saving lives. This top organ of the party leadership also extensively discussed and took decisions on outcomes of dialogues between sister organizations for starting joint-work as well as bringing together all political forces under a viable common organization

EPDP North America Zone

Also on 25 April, the leadership of the EPDP North America held a teleconference at which latest zonal developments were exhaustively discussed and future action plans drawn in face of the current changed situation for the party branches in North America and the rest of the world.

EPDP Europe Zone

Representatives of the EPDP branches spread in nine European countries on 28 March elected a five-member preparatory committee to organize the biannual congress of the zone. The newly elected committee held its first meeting on 4 April and adopted its work plan in preparing the congress for the 13 branches in Europe and the sub-zone in Germany which has three branches.

EPDP Branch of South Germany

On its part, the EPDP branch for Stuttgart and its environs held a regular meeting on 27 March and discussed various party issues in addition to laying out action plans that can fit the current situation. Branch members expressed their pride and satisfaction of being members of a party that steadfastly struggles to bring democratic change in Eritrea and confirmed their determination to work with all the 14 organizations that agreed last February in Frankfurt to work jointly till the removal of the dictatorship. The branch also discussed what its members can do to help communities around them in the fight to save lives from coronavirus.

Online Seminar for EPDP Australia Branches

On 15 March, members of EPDP branches in Australia attended an online meeting conducted by the head of EPDP Organizational Office, Menghestab Asmerom, and the head of party Information Office, Debessai Beyene. Raised at the meeting were issues of great interest to party members in Australia who do not usually find it convenient to participate at all-membership briefings. Internal EPDP developments, unity dialogues and geopolitical issues affecting Eritrea and its people were among the topics discussed at the meeting.

EPDP Norway Branch Meeting



The party branch in Oslo, Norway, on 1 March 2020 held a regular membership meeting which was addressed by EPDP Central Council member, Medhanie Habtezghi.

Besides discussing significant internal and Eritrean opposition camp issues, the Oslo branch meeting drew plans of expanding joint activities with sister organizations and civic movements in the region.

EPDP CHAIRMAN HOLDS MEETING IN FRANKFURT WITH VETERANS OF THE PROLONGED ERITREAN STRUGGLE

On 8 March, a few days before the lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, the EPDP Chairman, Tesfai Woldemichael (Degiga), held a very important meeting in Frankfurt with a good number of former members of the party. He highlighted a wide-ranging issues in regard to the current struggle for democratic change, the proud participation of the veterans in this struggle as well as the dangers facing Eritrea and its people today because of the one-man dictatorship.



Meeting participants paid promised to continue their dedication to the ongoing struggle and requested the EPDP Chairman to continue such meetings in the future. Taking part in the discussions moderated by EPDP branch chairman Tadesse Asmelash included Central Council members Dr. Aklilu Ghirmai and Negusse Tseggai.



Wad Sherifey School Ends Academic Year:

The Wad Sherifey Refugee School in Eastern Sudan ended its academic year on 15 March without the usual closing ceremonies because of the coronavirus pandemic in the world. Started last July with 696 registered students, the school year ended with 580 taking part in the final exams. The school supervisor, Idris Ismail, and the school director, Teklehaimanot Elfu, reported that 90.5% of those who took the final exams obtained good results to be promoted. The number of initially registered students goes down at end of academic years because of the constant movement of refugee families.

The school administration expressed profound gratitude to school supporters like the Eritrea-Swiss Association for Eritrean Children (ASEE), which provides annual teaching staff budgets, and Father Ghebrai Bedemariam, director of the Catholic School in Kas-sala, who is a close supporter of the school.

The school administrators also extended their special thanks to others who brought them material assistance during the academic year just ended. They reported that the EPDP

Women's League this year offered sanitary supplies sufficient for a year to a total of 200 girls in the school. The school also received 20 cartoons of exercise books and pens from Abel Ghebreyesus of Canada. Similarly, compatriot Abdalla Mahmoud Saleh of Australia and his Sabrin Organization for Humanitarian Affairs this year offered to the school 24 cartons of exercise books, sports supplies and a bonus of 1,000 Sudanese pounds to each teaching staff member in the school. For many years, members of the EPDP have been supportive of school in different ways.

