

Liberty

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Eritrean People's Democratic Party - EPDP*

NEW UN RAPPOREUR FOR ERITREA: WILL HE SUCCEED WHERE OTHERS FAILED?

The first UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Eritrea, Ms Sheila Keetharuth of Mauritius, ended her six-year hard work on the mandate (2012-2018) almost empty handed and resigned



lamenting loudly that all what awaits the tens of thousands of prisoners in Eritrea is nothing but “**detention until death.**” The three-person UN Commission of Inquiry that included its chair, Australia’s Mike Smith, Ms Keetharuth and Ghana’s Victor Dankwa , ended

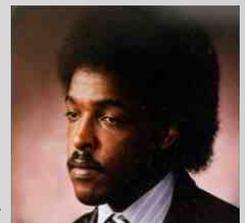


its two-year scrutiny on the Eritrean situation reporting that a “systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations” existed in the country that is “**ruled not by law but by fear**” and that it was time for the UN system to find ways of serving justice by holding Eritrean authorities accountable for their “**crimes against humanity.**” (> Contd. p 3).

ISAIAS AND CLIQUE TO FACE ‘CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY’ CASE IN SWEDEN FOR EU CITIZEN



October 2020 was a month of renewed hope for justice seeking Eritreans, who by now count more than 90% of the six-million population, a third of them outside home in forced exile. The most welcome news was the filing in Sweden a case of “crime against humanity” directed at the Eritrean dictator and his clique. Related good news of the season also came from the European



Parliament, the Netherlands and Canada. (> Contd. on p. 4)

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ERITREAN POLITICAL FORCES EXPRESS

CONCERNS TO UN HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICES

Chairpersons of six allied Eritrean Political Forces in exile addressed a message with “mixed feelings of hope and concern” about the future of the Eritrea mandate to Dr. Mohammed Abdel-salam Babiker, the newly appointed Sudanese UN Special Rapporteur for Eritrea with copies to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michele Bachelet, and the outgoing Eritrea Special Rapporteur, Daniela Kravetz.

The Eritrean message, dated 18 October, did not only congratulate the new appointee for his obtaining the trust of the UN Human Rights Council to hold the post vacated by the resignation of his predecessor, but also reminded him that no African delegation at the 45th Session of the Council voted in favour of the post he was taking over.

The authors of the message are the chairpersons of 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).

Printed below is the full text of the Eritrean opposition camp message – good reading.

Dear Professor Mohammed A. Babiker,

We, addressing this sincere congratulatory message to you as the new UN Special Human Rights Rapporteur for Eritrea, are representatives of allied Eritrean political opposition organizations in forced exile, and wish you success in the task of closely monitoring and helping to end the prolonged suffering and violation of political and human rights in Eritrea. (Contd on p. 5).



SUDANESE UN HR RAPPORTEUR FOR ERITREA

(Cont. from p. 1): The second UN Special Rapporteur, Professor Daniela Kravetz of Chile, tried for two years to help but resigned a few weeks after her July report to the 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council saying with desperation that there was “no new



evidence” that human rights are moving to the right direction in Eritrea. For the past eight years, all the UN experts were denied entry to Eritrea.

Now, the UN Human Rights Council has designated on 8 October Dr. Mohammed Abdelsalam Babiker from the Sudan to give a try to the



challenge of bringing about sanity in Eritrea. But can and will he be able to succeed where all his predecessors failed?

The ensemble of Eritrean Political Forces (see story on page xx) wrote a congratulatory message to the new UN Rapporteur for Eritrea not only wishing him success but also expressing their concerns about his appointment. Their concerns revolved around the half heartedness of Africa towards human rights in general and the situation in Eritrea in particular.

While waiting with crossed fingers that things will get better in the near future, Eritreans and friends in the pro-democracy and human rights community have no choice other than engaging to know more about the new mandate holder for human rights in Africa’s “North Korea”.

His Profile

Currently, Dr. Mohammed Abdelsalam Babiker is Associate Professor of International Law and Dean of the School of Law at the University of Khartoum. He is the founding Director of the University’s Human Rights Centre and author of a good number of publications on constitution-making, human rights law and the conflicts in the Sudan.

Dr. Babiker has reportedly published extensively in the areas of human rights, international criminal law, international humanitarian law and migration law, and contributed chapters in books and journal articles in the United Kingdom, France, Italy, USA and South Africa.



Most importantly, he was appointed by the UN Secretary-General as Humanitarian expert with the Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group (SEMG) besides working as legal advisor with UN and AU peacekeeping operations and a number of UN agencies.

Eritreans at home and abroad once more wait with crossed fingers to see the UN Human Rights Council and its new envoy help towards improving the intolerable situation in their country.

(Contd from p. 1):

In Stockholm, the Swedish prosecutor for international crimes received a case accusing the Eritrean dictator and seven accomplices to face charges for crimes against humanity. The case is supported by many high profile persons like 2003 Nobel peace laureate Shirin Ebadi; former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay; former African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights chair Pansy Tlakula...

In Brussels, the European Parliament released a strong statement calling for the release of EU citizen Dawit Isaak and other prisoners in Eritrea; asking the EU Commission to stop funding the regime, and condemning the Asmara regime's extraterritorial 'diaspora tax' and urging it "to respect freedom of movement and to end the 'guilt-by-association' policies that target the family members of those who evade national service, seek to flee Eritrea or fail to pay the 2 % income tax imposed by the government on Eritrean expatriates, including EU citizens."

In The Hague, Holland, Dutch Foreign Minister warned the Eritrean embassy to stop forced collection of 100 for Covid-19 from Dutch citizens of Eritrean origin. Embassy diplomat identified as Solomon Mehari was told to leave the country and that the Dutch would take more stern action if such things are continued.

In Victoria, Canada, the Nevsun Resources mining company was forced to settle with "significant" payment outside of court to Eritrean victims of "slave labour."

These welcome developments give reassuring indications that human rights violators in Eritrea, as the UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea concluded five years ago, will one day be accountable for the crimes they perpetrated.

REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS

FOR PRESS FREEDOM

Of these welcome tidings, the case of the Paris-based RSF (Reporters Without Borders) brought to the Swedish prosecutor on behalf of the Swedish and EU citizen Dawit Isaak, is nowadays the most discussed news item among Eritreans at home and abroad.

Arrested in September 2001 with dozens of journalists and political figures, journalist and poet Dawit Isaak, is the world's longest held journalist. Filed in Stockholm on RSF's behalf, the complaint names the Eritrean dictator as well as seven accomplices in crimes against humanity.

Drafted and filed by the Swedish lawyers Percy Bratt and Jesús Alcalá, the complaint has been co-signed by Isaak's brother, Esayas Isaak; by historian and expert in international affairs Susanne Berger, who coordinates the Raoul Wallenberg Research Initiative; by Björn Tunbäck, who heads the Dawit Isaak team within RSF's Swedish section; and by Antoine Bernard, international lawyer and senior advisor for International strategic litigation at RSF.



Per the RSF press release, eleven prominent jurists and well-known international figures have also backed the initiative: 2003 **Nobel Peace laureate Shirin Ebadi**; **former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay**; **former African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights chair Pansy Tlakula**; former Canadian justice minister Irwin Cotler; Bernhard Docke, a lawyer and member of the German Federal Bar's human rights committee; international human rights lawyer David Matas; Eritrean Law Society director Daniel Mekonnen; Philippe Sands, a British and French lawyer who is president of English PEN; Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa executive director Gaye Sowe; Straniak Academy for Democracy and Human Rights director Hannes Tretter; and University of Pretoria Centre for Human Rights director Frans Viljoen.

(Contd. from p. 2): Also by copy of this message, we seize the opportunity of deeply thanking your predecessors, Professor Daniela Kravetz, for her devoted two-year hard work, as well as Ms Sheila Keetharuth, who struggled for earlier six years to let the world know the never changing bad situation in Eritrea. Both your predecessors were denied entry to Eritrea ever since the mandate was established by the UN Human Rights Council in 2012.

Professor Babiker,

We cannot hide the fact that your being a Sudanese national brings to us mixed feelings of hope and concern. Hope because the Sudanese people, in particular the intelligentsia, were resolutely supportive of the just cause of the Eritrean people all along the 30 years of their struggle for national independence.

On the other hand, we have concerns about the political situation in our Africa and how African governments are handling the fundamental issues of human rights in every corner of the continent.

This was manifested, Sir, in the voting tally of last July at the 45th Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva when NO African delegate voted in favour of extending the Eritrea mandate you are now taking over from Professor Kravetz.

We are mentioning this fact only to highlight the challenges you could most likely be facing in handling the Eritrea problem at the Council, of which, ironically, the abusive Eritrean regime is also a voting member.

Dear Sir,

We feel we don't need to tell you what happened to Eritrea after its costly independence in 1991 and what is going on since then under a "liberator" turned absolute tyrant with few parallels in the entire region.

For sure, you, a prominent jurist and human rights person, are aware of the historic conclusions of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea in 2016 stating that it had no doubt that **crimes against humanity** were committed in Eritrea since its independence. In one of its urgent recommendations to the UN Human Rights Council and to the UN Security Council itself, the Commission of Inquiry asked that they:

“Ensure accountability for those responsible for serious human rights violations in Eritrea, including by means of referral by the Security Council of the situation in the country to the International Criminal Court, in line with the findings and recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry on human rights in Eritrea that there are reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed.”

Those recommendations and so many others remain put on hold for so many reasons obvious to the Eritrean people and their human rights sympathizers (See p. 6).

1. Condemns in the strongest terms Eritrea's systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations; calls on the Eritrean Government to put an end to detention of the opposition, journalists, religious leaders and innocent civilians;

Distinguished Professor Babiker,

By way of underlining the glaring facts, we wish to repeat here what we, the undersigned signatories, reminded the 44th Session of the UN Human Rights Council on 15 May 2020 at a meeting, notably, Zoghbi Dawit Isaak and other journalists detained since September 2001, demands immediate information regarding Dawit Isaak's whereabouts and well-being; urges the Eritrean authorities to provide him with access to representatives of the EU, the Member States and Sweden in order to establish his healthcare needs and any other necessary support;

Without a national constitution,

Without the very basic elements of the rule of law;

Without state institutions and functioning branches of government;

Without national elections for over quarter of a century;

Without freedom of the press, assembly, worship and movement;

Without the right of visitation to its prisoners (not even by the ICRC);

Without the right of a day at court for prisoners;

Unfortunately for Eritrea, the list is endless...

Only to conclude, we again wish you, Brother Mohammed A. Babikir, a rare success in this hard task and we hope your upcoming oral presentation in March 2021 will show light at the end of the tunnel. We also hope your reports will not conclude saying that the fate of the thousands of Eritrean prisoners is "nothing but **detention until death**," as Ms Sheila Keetharuth once put it.

Respectfully yours,

EPF chairpersons (signatures)

[EU Parliament Urges Africa to Address "Situation in Eritrea"](#)

The European Parliament's statement issued this October was one of the most significant calls for action to change the lingering and highly deplorable human rights and political situation in Eritrea.

Issued on 9 October 2020 and copied to the Eritrean President, the African Union, the UN Human Rights Council and other concerned bodies, the resolution on European Parliament used very strong words in demanding, among other things, the release of EU citizen Dawit Isaak and other political prisoners in Eritrea languishing in incommunicado dungeons for many years. The African Union was urged to step up its activities in the urgency of releasing prisoners in Eritrea. Following are among the **'must-read'** points included in the resolutions of the regional European organ:

3. Appeals to the African Union, as a partner of the EU with an explicit commitment to the universal values of democracy and human rights, to step up its activity in relation to the regrettable situation in Eritrea and to work together with the EU to secure the release of Dawit Isaak and other political prisoners;

4. Condemns the use by the Eritrean Government of the extraterritorial 'diaspora tax'; urges the government to respect freedom of movement and to end the 'guilt-by-association' policies that target the family members of those who evade national service, seek to flee Eritrea or fail to pay the 2 % income tax imposed by the government on Eritrean expatriates, including EU citizens;

5. Calls on the Commission to ascertain whether the conditionality of EU aid is respected and to ensure that no financing for projects in Eritrea, particularly those that are carried out using national service labour, benefits the Eritrean Government; deplores, in this regard, the fact that the Commission continues to finance the 'Roads Project', and calls on it to strictly respond to the needs of the Eritrean people for development, democracy, human rights, good governance, security and freedom of speech, press and assembly, and to evaluate tangible outcomes regarding human rights that have resulted from the EU-Eritrea strategy and the so-called 'dual track approach';



6. Demands that, given the current COVID-19 health crisis, the poor sanitary conditions in Eritrean prisons and the high risk of infection for detainees, adequate food, water, and medical care be promptly provided; expresses concern that the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the situation of famine and malnutrition that exists in parts of the country and is contributing to food shortages;

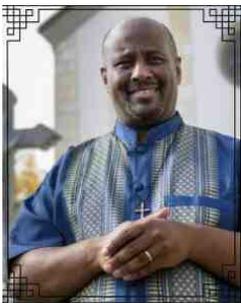
7. Demands that the Eritrean Government provide proof of life and detailed information on the fate and whereabouts of all those deprived of physical liberty; calls for fair trials for those accused, the immediate and unconditional release of any prisoners not charged with any crimes, and the abolition of torture and other degrading treatment such as restrictions on food, water and medical care; reminds the Eritrean Government of its obligation to address all human rights violations, including by investigating extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances as well as the capital punishment, which should be abolished in line with the recommendations presented in the UN Human Rights Council Annual Report 2020;

8. Deplores the fact that Eritrea provides no space for independent human rights defenders, members of the political opposition or independent journalists; calls, therefore, on the Eritrean Government to open civic space for independent civil society organizations and allow the creation of other political parties in the country; reminds Eritrea of its obligations under ILO conventions, with particular regard to the right of civil society organizations and trade unions to organize, peacefully demonstrate, participate in public affairs and campaign for better workers' rights;

9. Demands that the Eritrean Government desist from using its citizens as forced labour through indefinite national service and put an end to the compulsory practice of all children undertaking their final year of schooling in a military training camp;
10. Calls on Eritrea to lift the ban on independent media and to allow the creation of political parties, as a central tool for promoting democracy in the country; calls for human rights organizations to be allowed to freely operate within the country;
11. Demands that the Eritrean authorities put an end to detention of the opposition, journalists, religious leaders, civil society representatives and innocent civilians; urges Eritrea to fully respect and protect freedom of religion and to stop its ongoing persecutions on the basis of faith;
12. Demands that Eritrea fully respect and immediately enact the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and fully uphold its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, both of which prohibit torture.

ERITREAN ACHIEVERS OF THE SEASON IN FORCED EXILE

The sad fact about Eritreans is that a third of us are outside home for so many known reasons that started many decades earlier. The dream of every Eritrean in forced exile since the 1950s has been that a day will come when we will voluntarily and happily return back home. The dream is not yet fulfilled.



In the meantime, many Eritreans in exile have made good use of the 'temporary' sojourn outside home and scored valued achievements as human beings and citizens of Planet Earth. As such, a few names have this October joined the list of Eritrean achievers in exile, among them **Abba/Father Mussie Zerai in Europe and Ibrahim Omer** in faraway New Zealand.



Honorary Degree: Media reports during the month just ended informed the public that **Abba Mussie Zerai** was awarded Honorary Doctorate Degree by the University of Luzern, Switzerland, for his services to humanity by helping save thousands of refugees in real danger in the high seas and deserts of Sinai and Libya. Besides promoting refugee interests at international forums, he also assisted refugees in difficult legal cases some of which continued for over a decade. Once described as "Messenger of God by Action" by Germany's investigative magazine De Spiegel, the Eritrean priest currently coordinator of church matters in Europe, was among the nominees for Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 for his contributions in support of stranded refugees.

Elected Congressman: Another achiever in October 2020 was a young **Ibrahim Omer** who was elected as Labour Party MP (Member of Parliament) in New Zealand. Ibrahim Omer (>p.9)

left Eritrea in 2003, making the dangerous border crossing to neighboring Sudan. He spent years in UN-run refugee camps where he worked as an interpreter he was detained on suspicious allegations until he was rescued by the UN offered the chance to go to New Zealand.

He obtained his degree by paying his study fees by working full time at nights cleaning the university he attended. When asked why young Eritreans flee from their home country in such big numbers, his answer was “because they run out of options” and that “they would rather die trying than dying a slow and painful death” at home.

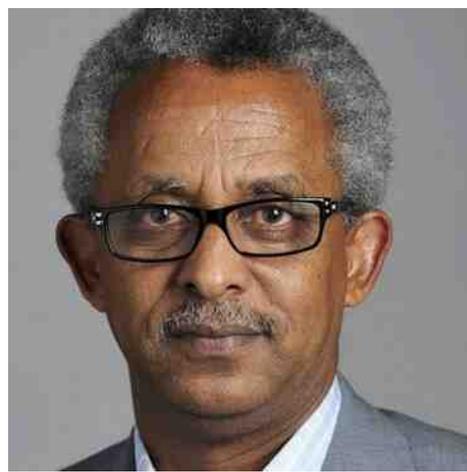
As noted above, there have of course been many Eritreans achievers in different fields during the past several decades. Holding power and being elected to political post is one of the most valued achievements.

Last year in the United States, this most significant political ladder was climbed by **US Congressman Joe Neguse**, a 35 year-old son of an Eritrean migrant, who was elected to the American Congress representing the State of Colorado. He was the first Eritrean to do so in America and the first black person from the State of Colorado.



It is also to be recalled that Sweden and its Social Democratic Party has been encouraging naturalized persons to run to high posts in the country, including being elected as lawmakers in the Swedish Parliament (Rikstag).

In 2002, **Rezene Tesfazion**, a long-time effective member of the EPLF during the years of national liberation struggle and now a leadership member of the EPDP; and **Mariam Osman Sherifay**, born in Cairo in 1950s of an Eritrean father and an Egyptian mother, were the first persons of Eritrean origin to be elected to the Swedish Parliament. In later years, they were followed by the election to the same Swedish legislature/Rigstag of **Arhe Hamednaka** (2010-2018), a veteran of the national liberation struggle with the ELF.



These achievements in the political sphere are significant because these persons of Eritrean origin have enjoyed rights outside home what they and their compatriots back home were denied even after Eritrea freed itself from alien rule over 29 years ago.

One would therefore encourage young Eritreans to strive to win in political elections wherever they are and continue achieving in other different fields of their choice **until the long dreamt return back home is realized.**



EPDP ACTING DESPITE COVID-19



EPDP Chair Message on 59th Anniversary of 1st of September

Eritreans annually celebrate the 1st of September to mark the start of the armed struggle in 1961. In a message on this year's 59th anniversary, EPDP Chairman Tesfai Woldemichael (Degiga), said that the current struggle for change and democracy in Eritrea is "at the threshold of victory." Yet, he called on all Eritreans to make a final hard push in unison "to get rid of a regime at the brink of collapse." The EPDP Chairman's message expressed strong belief in the nowadays building up unity of the Eritrean political forces and the popular Yiakil/Kafa (Enough is Enough) movement in every corner of the world. He also paid tribute to Patriot Hamid Idris Awate, the initiator-leader of armed struggle and all fallen national heroes of the revolution.

The EPDP Executive Committee at its meetings of 5 and 7 September adopted annual work plans for each executive office and plans of other organs of the party. The nine EC members, including its chairman, were re-elected at the annual meeting held on 15 and 16 August of the Central Council.

Frankfurt Branch Meeting: The EPDP branch for Frankfurt and its environs held a regular meeting on 8 September and discussed various issues including branch and party activities as well as ongoing work in the opposition camp and the situation of Eritreans everywhere, especially those at home under the cruelties of dictatorship.

Germany Sub-Zone Meeting: On 19 September, EPDP Central Council members Neguse Tseggai and Ms Tiebe Tekie addressed the Germany sub-zone meeting for all the three branches. The keynote speakers dwelt on major party issues, on the ongoing dialogues with sister organizations as well as the ever worrisome developments inside Eritrea and the region. Sub-Zone chairman Tesfamariam Kibreab and EPDP Europe Zone chairman, Issak Woldemariam, and made valuable interventions.

Workshop on Social Media: The three EPDP Executive Committee offices for Organizational Affairs as well as the Youth and Women's Affairs have an ongoing training and awareness programme held online periodically. On 19 September, Central Council member Amanuel Beraki conducted a useful workshop on how to use the social media channels. The event was much appreciated by party members using the social media.

Awareness Seminar: On 4 October, head of Youth Affairs, Yassin Osman Neberai, held a virtual seminar for EPDP members on the subject of "youth driven popular uprisings" and the factors that make them happen. Extensively talked on accumulated people's resentments that finally boil up to uprising mainly led by young generations like what was seen in the Arab Spring of 2011 and the currently building up Eritrean Yiakil Movement. He underlined the inter-relationship between non-violent struggle, the involvement of youth and effective coordination and unity of the political and civic society organizations.

EPDP Chairman, EC Members Meet Australia Branch: On 10 October, party branches in different cities in faraway Australia were addressed in a virtual meeting by the EPDP Chairman and four other Executive Committee members. Due to time differences, members of the EPDP branches in Australia missed a good number of total membership meetings. Thus, the chairman and his team from the organizational, finance, information and youth offices, had to dwell in great lengths of what has been done in the past within their respective branches as well as other key developments affecting Eritrea and the justice seekers' camp.

EPDP North America Zone Hold Tele-Conference: On 24 October, party members in the North America Zone held a Tele-conference and discussed issues related to the NA Zone as well as other major developments affecting Eritrea. The conference decided to hold the NA Zone congress in mid-January 2021. To this end, all branches were advised to submit by 4 November candidates for election of zone leadership at the congress.