

Open Letter

Eritrean Civil Society Organizations and Grassroots Movements

25 July 2018

His Excellency Dr. Abiy Ahmed
Prime Minister of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Your Excellency:

We, the undersigned Eritrean diaspora civil society organizations and grassroots movements, are writing, first, to express our utmost respect for the leading role you are playing, as a leader and concerned citizen in the substantive positive changes introduced in your country Ethiopia, moving forward by embracing peace, hope and justice for all Ethiopians. Your messages of progress, and prosperity for the entire region of the Horn of Africa is commendable. We admire your immediate action of releasing Ethiopian political prisoners; lifting the state of emergency; inviting all political opposition groups and media outlets in the Diaspora to return to Ethiopia. This has already created a culture of inclusion, where all Ethiopians would be able to participate in political activity and take part in the development of their country.

Second, we would like to congratulate your government's swift and remarkable decision to normalize the situation with Eritrea, by accepting to fully implement the Algiers's Peace Agreement and the ruling of the Ethiopia and Eritrea Border Commission (EEBC) without any preconditions. This will enable both countries to close the chapter of the "no war no peace" situation that has prevailed for the last 16 years and will certainly usher a new era of peace to the people of both countries, both governments and to the whole region.

Third, we believe you are aware of the very sad, and unparalleled situation in Eritrea. Eritrea and Eritreans are under the grip of dictatorship for decades after a long struggle and heavy sacrifice for national independence. At this point of time, Eritrea has no standing parliament or representative of people since 2002. The ratified constitution of 1997 has not been implemented. The decision making follows no procedure and solely rests on one man. As a result, thousands of Eritrean citizens including religious leaders, ministers and journalists are in countless prisons with no recourse to the rule of law. Many Eritreans are locked in jails for their religious beliefs, and hundreds of thousands of Eritreans are condemned to endless national service and military conscription. The Eritrean government has extended its grip to power with all forms of inhuman and cruel means. As you and the world know and as documented by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Eritrea, the government and its officials have committed grave human rights violations that constitute "crime against humanity". The entire Eritrean population live in fear of reprisal for opposing such heinous acts. Yet, we have not seen any attempt by the Eritrean government to reconcile with the people of Eritrea except; the continuation of silencing, jailing and killing by brute force.

We trust you will understand the quest of the Eritrean people for the restoration of their democratic rights that will ensure the sustainability of peace and good neighborly relations. To this end, we would like to ask you to be supportive of the Eritrean people's demand for a constitutional government. This can only be realized when the government of President Isaias Afewerki follows a genuine change taking your lead as an example of releasing all political prisoners, journalists and those who are placed in jail for their religious beliefs for reconciliation. It is imperative for diaspora-based opposition groups and media outlets to be allowed to return to their country to operate and express their views freely.

Moreover, we would like to express our appreciation of the Ethiopian Government's welcoming stance and providing safety to the thousands of Eritrean refugees and for providing educational opportunities to many young Eritreans.

Having carefully assessed the rapidly changing developments and recognizing the opportunities for lasting peace, we, the undersigned Eritrean Diaspora Civil Society and Grassroots Organizations, would like to state our position and principles as follows:

1. The full implementation of the Algiers Agreement is the bedrock of a lasting peace and the normalization of bilateral relations. Hence, a speedy demarcation of the border, with specific timetable and with transparent participation of the population of the affected areas is an essential component of ensuring durable peace and the territorial integrity of both countries as stipulated by the Algiers Agreement and the EEBC's decision;
2. We strongly believe that the Eritrean people are the only vehicle of sovereignty and the only source of power in Eritrea to freely determine their own destiny. Hence any major dealings with the dictatorial regime lack legitimacy and become source of future conflict. As a result, we request your government to consult with Eritrean people, before undertaking any major agreements and dealings with the regime that puts the Eritrean people at dark and at a disadvantage. We believe a peace deal that is based on transactional grounds without the endorsement of legitimately elected parliament will be vulnerable;
3. We request your government to cooperate with Eritreans living in the border area and allow the movement of people, goods and services to rebuild their shattered lives;
4. We would like to express the need to ensure the safety of all Eritreans residing in Ethiopia irrespective of their political affiliations, thoughts, work, and personality, as respected and guaranteed under the UNHCR protection. To this effect, we humbly request your government to provide full protection to all Eritreans residing in Ethiopia.

Last but not least we welcome your initiative to improve the relationship of both people and towards a bright future of both nations based on mutual respect. We appreciate the tenderness of your heart and love to the people of Eritrea and we assure you that our feeling is likewise to the Ethiopian people.

May God bless you with wisdom to continue your sacred mission of peace and integration by undertaking transparent, constructive and inclusive approach in handling regional affairs and relationships.

Yours Sincerely,

Eritrean Diaspora Civil Society Organizations and Grassroots Movements

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