

Asmara, 22 February, 2020

To the National Office for Religious Affairs
Asmara – Eritrea.

On February 22nd, 2020, on the occasion of the golden jubilee and patronal feast of the Cathedral Church of Kidanemhret, seat of the Metropolitan Bishop, in Asmara, our illustrious guests his Eminence Card. Berhaneyesus Demerew Suraphiel, his Excellence Abune Mussiè Ghebreghiorghis Uqbu, bishop of Emdeber (Guraghe), and the Right Reverend Abba Teshome Fikre Weldetensaè, general secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ethiopia - upon their arrival at the airport of Asmara for the above mentioned celebrations – were denied the permission to enter our capital city. We, hereby, wish to express our deep regret for this most unfortunate incident, whose reasons we have, so far, no means of comprehending.

This Catholic Secretariat of Eritrea had, previously, sent out an invitation to attend the celebrations in program to various friends and sympathizers of our Church in this country, and the above mentioned authorities of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia had assured us of their intention to come and join us. In consideration of both their distinguished ecclesiastical ranks and our people's long and rich historical traditions of hospitality, we had undertaken an effort to obtain a VIP visa for them, without a specific request from them. Our demand was rejected, whereas no explanation was provided to us for that refusal.

Such being the situation, we had no other chance but wait for our eminent guests to reach Asmara through the same processes as all other visitors. This expectation of ours derived from the fact that, in the wake of the reconciliation between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the citizens of both States enter each other's country with no formal visas obtained beforehand. Our own experience in fact is that, each time we go to Ethiopia, the entry permission is printed on our passports only upon our arrival at the Ethiopian Capital's airport. We have also witnessed that the same parameters are applied with regard to the Ethiopian visitors coming to Eritrea. That was the very reason why we refrained from asking an entry visa for our illustrious guests.

Now we are coming to you with the present to letter with a view to stating that we still remain in the dark as to the reasons of the facts that have sadly occurred on 22 February at the international airport of Asmara. At the same time, while we reiterate that the eminent ecclesiastical personalities involved therein were our most distinguished guests, we would like to state our considerate reservations on the whole regretful subject. As we have come to understand later on, our Ethiopian guests had received the entry permit stamped on their passports, valid for one month. This notwithstanding, most disconcerting for us, as Eritreans, was the fact that they were made to wait at the airport of Asmara from Saturday, 22 February, 5.15p.m. to Sunday 23 February, 12.00 noon, 2020, to eventually return home right from there.

May God bless our Country.

Abba Tesfaghiorghis Kiflom
General Secretary

(Official translation from the original Tigrigna texts)