



Human Rights Concern Eritrea

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Open Letter to His Excellency Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed

Your Excellency,

We at Human Rights Concern-Eritrea wish to congratulate you on your efforts to forge a lasting peace with Eritrea, concluding an agreement which promises to end 20 years of state of hostilities following the border war which killed over 100,000 people. And we also wish to thank you most sincerely for the way in which Ethiopia, under your leadership, has continued to welcome desperate Eritrean refugees who are entering your country in large numbers every week. We commend the actions of your government and parliament which legislated in January 2019 to give refugees the legal right to work, access primary education, obtain driver's licenses, register births and marriages, and open a bank account. These humanitarian actions are those of a truly good neighbourly state.

But we must ask you to consider most carefully why up to 5,000 Eritreans are fleeing each month from their homeland? There must be serious problems in multiple aspects of human rights within Eritrea to cause this. You are no doubt well aware that, after 30 years of struggle and following nearly 30 years of independence, Eritrea has degenerated into a repressive state, in which national legislative elections are never held and all constitutional provisions protecting individual freedom ignored. With the ratified Constitution collecting dust, no independent judiciary, no independent civil society or media, the government has instituted draconian restrictions on political and religious freedom and established National Military Service without any time limit, instituting a harsh system of 'forced labour' which amounts to slavery. It is virtually impossible for conscripts, whatever their age, to secure release from active service.

It is with the leader of this dictatorial government and highly undemocratic state that you are forging intimate friendship, and negotiating future relationships for our two countries. We ask you to consider critically the validity and trustworthiness of 'Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship' which you signed with President Afwerki.

Whilst in Ethiopia you have made many moves to democratise your country, and released prisoners of conscience, President Isaias has made no such moves. Eritrea has seen no signs of change, no intention to apply the constitution or establish the rule of law. The arrest on 17 September 2018 of Eritrea's former finance minister, Berhane Abrehe Kidane, for peacefully urging an end to dictatorship, is a sign that the same familiar repressive tactics remain the norm in Eritrea.

The new peace deal you signed with President Isaias is not transparent, and the Eritrean people have been told nothing about it by their unelected leader. What constitutional basis, what legal guarantees does this agreement, have without the ratification of a parliament? In June 2018, you accepted the Algiers Agreement on border ruling without preconditions; seven months later, nothing has been done, no actions taken to implement the agreement.

Esteemed Prime Minister, whilst admiring and supporting the positive actions you have taken for peace, may we also convey to you our alarm at some remarks you have recently made concerning Eritrea? During your first visit to Eritrea, you said that you would “act as an informal Foreign Minister of Eritrea”. Is it wise to identify so closely with the brutal and illegal regime of Isaias Afewerki? And in January 2019, during your visit to Switzerland, you said, "There is no need to have different army for Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti...or to have three or four embassies in Switzerland for those countries. We are poor countries. We can share embassies."

It is with the best interests of both Ethiopia and Eritrea at heart that we would like to warn you and your diplomats to refrain from promoting the Eritrean regime by words or actions, either overtly or covertly. By complimenting the Eritrean government, you are by implication promoting the continued and flagrant abuse of human rights in Eritrea and encouraging the unelected president to continue committing crimes against humanity on the Eritrean people.

Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti are sovereign states and went to war over disputed lands in the last 20 years; over 100,000 people died and thousands have been internally displaced. The border problems with Ethiopia and Djibouti are pending, and not yet resolved. Therefore, we find your remarks unappealing and offensive. We Eritreans have enough problems of our own at the moment and we are asking President Isaias Afewerki to hand over power to the Eritrean people. It would be wise if you could focus on your own country while we are struggling to liberate our people.

Please accept this advice in the spirit with which it is offered, with due regard for the best interests, welfare and lasting peace of the Eritrean and Ethiopian people.

Respectfully,

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