

Peaceful Demonstration in Asmara

The peaceful demonstration that took place in Asmara on Tuesday 31 October 2017 has widely reverberated on the social media.

The trigger for the peaceful demonstration was the closure by the government, about two weeks earlier, of the *Al Daa* Islamic School located in Akhria. Incensed by the closure, the students' parents and members of the school board convened at the school premises to express their firm opposition and demand the reopening of the school and resumption of its services. However, the dictatorial regime, which does not respect the basic rights of citizens or allow any kind of opposition, detained elder Haji Mussa Mohamednur, chairman of the school board, and an unspecified number of persons.

Under the circumstances, the students held a peaceful demonstration on Tuesday 31 October to protest the closure of the school and demand its reopening as well as the release of the chairman of the school board and the other detainees. The peaceful demonstration was scuttled by the police and armed soldiers, who fired into the air to disperse the protesters and charged with batons, beating and chasing them. Even though some protesters sustained severe injuries from beatings, it was recounted that no one was killed; that there was no loss of life at all. Furthermore, it was stated that there followed checking up of mobility permit papers and roundups throughout Asmara and Akhria, in particular.

The following day, the government tried to divert attention from the incident by redeploying the soldiers to their quarters and stabilising the situation throughout Asmara. Since the confrontation had caught the eyes and ears of the people, however, sources indicate that the government is busy disseminating news, via its "03" rumour mill, that reproach the action with the aim of intimidating the people into condemning it. Nevertheless, this courageous protest deserves to be commended, encouraged and supported, rather than condemned, by the entire Eritrean people.

Eritrea today is administered by a lawless regime. Otherwise, the State should, absolutely, not mix politics and religion or interfere in religious affairs. Nor should it forcefully close a private school that has been providing educational service for decades. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that, as a matter of general principle, a functional government that cares for the country and people has the great responsibility to oversee the system of learning and standardise the curriculum in order to ensure the national right of students to appropriate education. On the other hand, it is of paramount importance, whenever such events unfold, to desist from provoking unnecessary antagonism or disseminating false information that could undermine the primary objective of the national struggle for democratic change in our country.