



OEA Deplores the Politicization of Refugee Plights

Your Honor,

As you are aware, The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (TLHRC) is holding a hearing titled by “*Eritrea: Root Causes of the Refugee Crisis*” scheduled for Wednesday, April 18, 2018, however, we are afraid it might be one-sided panel that fails to reflect the reality in Eritrea. The root causes of the refugee crisis is not lack of human rights in Eritrea, but Ethiopia’s evil machination. When it comes to human rights, Eritrea, like many developing countries, has its own challenges. However, if these challenges are not taken within their proper context, in this case Ethiopian warmongering and determined desire to destabilize Eritrea, they can only distort the reality and in the process misleading the US Congress. As Eritrea’s culture of religious and ethnic harmony and tolerance is well documented, this august body should not be used to disseminate distortions about Eritrea and its people. Eritrea is a peaceful nation enjoying stability, security and social harmony. Eritrea is also a nation engaged in hard work to ensure its population’s human rights, dignity and security. It is a country that has successfully kept at bay religious radicalization, extremism and terrorism. It is also a nation playing a constructive role for peace and security in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa regions. For these reasons Eritrea deserves your support and understanding.

Your Honor,

To serve as a context we would like to bring the following points to your attention:

- Politicization of migration of Eritreans by some organizations and nations is preventing the issue of refugees from being addressed in its proper context. Eritrea is a victim of a politically motivated agenda of draining its human resources-especially its educated youth.
- Eritrea has faced a serious challenge of illegal migration, human trafficking and the willful exploitation of the suffering of Eritrean youth for strategic and political purposes. A distorted picture of the country, far off from the reality on the ground, is presented for political agenda by some quarters, chief among them is Ethiopia and those in bed with the regime. Every narration we hear about Eritrea is tainted by Ethiopian regime’s disinformation. European countries as well as the United States for their own reasons have also been following misguided policies that are inducing unprecedented migration not only out of Eritrea but the Horn of Africa.
- US and European open door policy to Eritrean refugees is also being exploited by Ethiopians (especially Tigrayans, the ethnic group that is dominating Ethiopian politics, military, and economy) to enter the West. This means an overwhelming majority of those claimed to be Eritreans are in fact not Eritreans. For example in November of 2016, Austrian Ambassador to Ethiopia, Andreas Melan, had admitted that 40 percent of Eritrean migrants in Europe are actually Ethiopians. His words: “*thousands of Ethiopians continue to migrate illegally to Saudi Arabia and South Africa, those who fled to Europe usually claim they are from Eritrea as that has a better chance of recognition for asylum. The ‘mass exodus’ of Ethiopians that no one speaks about attracts over 100,000 Ethiopians annually*”.¹ If one includes all the other East Africans who are claiming to be Eritreans to the Ethiopian numbers it is not hard to imagine what fraction of the often quoted numbers are real Eritreans.
- We believe one Eritrean refugee is one too many; however, we urge Congress to conduct its own investigation to find out how many of those recently resettled in the US as “Eritrean” refugees are actually Eritreans. The Ethiopian government is in a serious business of identity theft. It has been stealing Eritrean identities and giving it to its own ethnic Tigrayans and resettling them in Europe, the USA and Canada. Many of the victims that are being “*exploited by smugglers, and traffickers, or find themselves in Libyan slave*

¹ Flüchtlinge - Legale Auswanderung ist für Äthiopier tabu <http://www.tt.com/home/10694454-91/1%C3%BCchtlinge---legale-auswanderung-ist-%C3%BCr-%C3%A4thiopier-tabu.csp> (Accessed 4/17/2018)

markets enduring detention, torture, and forced labor”, are first and foremost victims of identity theft by the Ethiopian regime. These victims are forced to risk journey through the Sahara Desert, terrorist-infested Libya and the dangerous waters of the Mediterranean Sea, all because they have no legal means of resettling in the West.

- Ethiopia is also benefitting from the trafficking of Eritreans through Ethiopia. Ethiopia’s ARRA (Administration for Refugee & Returnee Affairs), has set up a lucrative business and the UNHCR is an accomplice in this crime. Since Ethiopia receives millions of dollars for “hosting” Eritrean refugees, it has been massaging refugee numbers at will as a cash-cow. The UNHCR claims 5,000 Eritreans enter Ethiopia every month using numbers supplied by Ethiopia and the UN compensates Ethiopia, in foreign currency, for 5,000 refugees every month. Eritrea has asked the United Nations to conduct an independent investigation into the trafficking of Eritreans, but to this date, the UN has not done so.
- The reasons people give for seeking refugee status are also those lifted from published UNHCR guidelines on how someone qualifies as an Eritrean refugee. Every East African (Ethiopian, Sudanese, or Somali) even West Africans has memorized these guidelines and the information that asylum seekers often provide is verbatim recycling of these UNHCR guidelines. It is like the student who gets access to exam questions and the answer key before a test and gets the answers right.
- Eritrea’s youth have also been systematically lured out of the country, including fresh college graduates, as well as Eritreans who have been sent overseas for higher education. One of the panelists, Mr. Abraham Zere, is one of those who were provided free education by the people of Eritrea, sent overseas to further his education, however, instead of returning home to serve his people, he decided to come to the US because he knows well he is economically better off in the US than in Eritrea. Here he is fleecing US taxpayers through information laundering and disinformation. It is a pity that Mr. Zere has to drag Eritrea’s image through the mud in order to cover the misrepresentation he made to get political asylum in the US.
- As scores of European delegations visit Eritrea, for example the Danish Immigration Service fact finding mission, the Home Office of the United Kingdom, the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Swiss delegations, a more accurate picture of the reality in Eritrea is emerging, including that the majority of refugees out of Eritrea are actually not political, but economic refugees. Here is how a Danish report put it: *“A Western embassy (D) in Eritrea stated that ‘most people who leave Eritrea do so for economic reasons and because of lack of livelihood opportunities and not because of political repression. ... A UN agency in Eritrea confirmed that hardly anyone leaves Eritrea for political reasons.’”*²
- Eritrean current reality has to be taken in the context of what the country had to go through. Next door to Eritrea is hostile Ethiopia that had brought incalculable suffering upon the people of Eritrea. Ethiopia is illegally occupying Eritrea’s sovereign territories, Ethiopia is itching to start another bloody war in hopes of getting access to the sea by force and it is also harboring Jihadists trained with Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in hopes of turning Eritrea into another failed state like neighboring Somalia. The US government knows well that Eritrea was the first victim of Bin Laden’s international terrorism when had set shop in the Sudan in the early 1990s.
- Some might want to cry of “religious persecution” in Eritrea, that is not the case. Eritrea, aware of the dangers of religious extremism had only required religious organizations not to seek or receive foreign financing. Many of those religious groups that are often mentioned being in trouble with the Eritrean government, according to US State Department’s own reporting, are those who were unwilling to comply with the law of the land or register with an appropriate government body. There is also the case of a religious group that refused to take an Eritrean Identity in 1992 as the country was in the process of separating from Ethiopia stating they are not interested in temporal identity. Nobody had touched members of that group who claimed their Eritrean identity.

² Eritrea – Drivers and Root Causes of Emigration, National Service and the Possibility of Return, <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/B28905F5-5C3F-409B-8A22-0DF0DACBDAEF/0/EritreareportEndeligversion.pdf> (Accessed 4/17/2018)

- There is no question Eritrea has faced a difficult decade and half and the quality of life of its people has been negatively affected. The US-Ethiopia engineered UN sanctions as well as the 16 year-long Ethiopian occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories, and the prolonged National Service Program have had a negative impact on the people of Eritrea. Nevertheless, Eritrea has been making slow but steady progress in food security, health and educational services and had achieved six of the eight UN Millennium Development Goals on time and is committed to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Its investment in human resources development, agriculture and infrastructure is promising a tangible improvement in peoples' lives. Eritrea's investment on higher education, training, skills and opportunities for its youth, will not only enable Eritrea to overcome economic challenges that are contributing as push factors but also to build a solid basis for a just and prosperous society that will pull all its children back home.

Your Honor,

As Americans of Eritrean origin, we have a vested interest in seeing the plight of Eritrean refugees being addressed properly and refugees no matter where they come from been given all the help they can get. However, this help shouldn't be based on false premises and at the expense of demonizing Eritrea.

As at the root of the problem is Ethiopia's continued occupation of Eritrean territories, warmongering and saber rattling. We hope you will do everything within your power to compel Ethiopia to vacate the sovereign Eritrean territories it is occupying, to end the UN sanctions that are imposed on Eritrea based on Ethiopia initiated fabrications and engage the Eritrean government to further the causes of human rights and human dignity.

Thank you.

Organization of Eritrean Americans (OEA)