

EMBARGO 1 APRIL 2015 00:00 hours GMT
Press Release

Rewarding repression: Proposals to aid the Eritrean government

Hastily drawn up and poorly considered plans by several governments appear about to provide succour and support to one of Africa's most notorious regimes. The process is led by the European Union, which is planning to provide a substantial bilateral aid package worth € 312 million to Eritrea. This is almost a three-fold increase from 2009, and comes despite scathing assessments of the human rights of Eritrea by bodies including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

A group of international scholars, who have worked on the Horn of Africa for many years, has united with Eritrean activists and former Eritrean diplomats to denounce the proposal. The plans are driven by a desire to cut the number of Eritrean refugees flowing out of the country and seeking asylum in Europe and beyond. These proposals will not halt this exodus. Nor will it do anything to prevent hundreds of Eritreans dying while crossing the Sahara and the Mediterranean.

A previous attempt by the EU to embrace the regime in 2007 ended in failure. Then it was tied to assurances that Dawit Isaak, a Swedish-Eritrean journalist, arrested in a widespread crackdown in 2001, would be released and allowed to leave the country. Not only was the assurance reneged on, there was no discernable improvement in the country's notorious human rights regime.

The current plans come after vague assurances that Eritrea's policy of indefinite military conscription will be reduced to a period no longer than 18 months. But President Isaias Afewerki, who rules the country with a rod of iron, has made no official policy announcement to this effect.

Rather, an official UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea, has been repeatedly denied the opportunity to visit to country, to undertake a comprehensive and authoritative review of its human rights practices.

The appeal calls on the all government's to:

- abide by their legal requirements to provide sanctuary to Eritrean refugees and
- urges the European Commission to put on hold its preparations for an aid package to the Eritrean government until such time that the UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea has been given full and unfettered access to Eritrea

In addition we call on the Eritrean government to provide unfettered access to the UN Commission of Inquiry, so that it can fulfill its mandate.

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Statement attached