



September 28, 2018

Senator Chris Coons
127A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Eritrea on the Cusp

Dear Senator Coons:

The future of human rights in Eritrea is on the cusp.

In June 2018, Ethiopia's new prime minister Abiy Ahmed startled the world by proposing to make peace with his country's long-standing arch-enemy Eritrea. Specifically, Abiy offered to accept Eritrea's claim to disputed border territory that had been the subject of a vicious war from 1998 to 2000 and a hostile military stand-off since then. In the weeks and months that followed, the two countries indeed began normalizing relations, they signed a peace agreement, and they embarked on initiatives to spread comity among other countries in the Horn of Africa.

The war and the ensuing cross-border insecurity had been one cause of (or at least a pretext for) the harsh clamp-down on human rights that had flowered in Eritrea shortly after the cessation of the initial hostilities, under the direction of Eritrea's notorious president Isaias Afwerki. That clamp-down, in which the Eritrean government had brutally repressed the Eritrean people and had committed widespread atrocities against them, had led to a stunning exodus of hundreds of thousands of Eritreans – to Israel, across North Africa toward Europe, and some even to the United States.

Thousands died trying to cross the Mediterranean. Thousands experienced atrocities at the hands of smugglers, traffickers and others in North Africa – first in Sinai, and later in Libya; and in Libya many remain trapped and abused today, as described by The America Team and other NGOs in a September 21, 2018 letter to the United Nations that appears at the end of this letter and here: <http://eritreanrefugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Urgent-Letter-REFUGEES-TRAPPED-in-LIBYA.pdf> .

The America Team for Displaced Eritreans is a 501(c)(3) Public Charity, EIN 27-2142524.

The America Team for Displaced Eritreans

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Many tens of thousands continue to live, grimly and often perilously, as refugees in Ethiopia and Sudan.

The America Team and other observers keenly hope that the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea might ultimately lead to an improvement in human rights conditions within Eritrea – including by way of implementing a constitution, releasing political prisoners, and shortening the harsh and indefinite National Service; an end to the refugee out-flow; and the safe return of many Eritrean refugees to their native land, under the supervision of the United Nations.

We do not, however, expect those things to occur overnight. As of this date, they have not; the repression in Eritrea goes on; and thousands of Eritreans continue to flee their country. In addition, the region remains volatile, including with respect to a growing incidence of ethnic violence in Ethiopia. At the same time, we and other observers have noted with concern the increasing influence of China and other non-democratic states in the Horn, to the potential disadvantage of that region and American interests and ideals. We are also concerned about whether Ethiopia will continue to care for and protect its Eritrean refugees.

We now urge that the United States government become as deeply engaged as possible in attempting to:

1. Foster an improvement in Eritrean human rights.
2. Protect Eritrean refugees in Libya, Sudan, Ethiopia and elsewhere.
3. Promote development, democracy and security in the Horn generally, with a view to achieving robust partnerships with the West.

Sincerely,



George Ghebresslassie, Wilmington Delaware
Senior Member, The America Team for Displaced Eritreans



John Stauffer
President, The America Team for Displaced Eritreans

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September 21, 2018

His Excellency António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations

cc: The Honorable Mike Pompeo, United States Secretary of State
The Honorable Nikki Haley, United States Ambassador to the United Nations
Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Mr. Antonio Vitorino, Director General, International Organization for Migration

Re: Refugees Trapped in Libya

We – the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), The America Team for Displaced Eritreans, and the additional signatories appearing below – write to you urgently on this matter.

USCRI actively protects the rights and addresses the needs of persons in forced or voluntary migration worldwide and supports their transition to a dignified life. With a Network of over 100 field offices and partner agencies across the United States and elsewhere, our international nongovernmental organization has worked on behalf of refugees and immigrants since 1911. The America Team for Displaced Eritreans is a U.S. based non-profit organization that assists Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers in the United States and around the world.

The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees provide that persons fleeing persecution across borders deserve international protection, including basic rights as to their well-being and security. We believe that these rights are part of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR's) protection mandate.

Some eight thousand Eritreans and other sub-Saharan African refugees, migrants and trafficking victims have recently found themselves caught in the crossfire among warring militias in Libya, as security has rapidly deteriorated in Tripoli and elsewhere. Their circumstances are dire. Many – men, women and children – are hidden in detention facilities and makeshift jails. Some have recently died in at least one detention warehouse for lack of food and basic sanitation. Others have escaped and are in hiding or living in the street in search of protection from traffickers and militias. There have been credible reports of rape. We have also received numerous reports that the individuals lack food, medical attention and basic physical security. They could starve, die of disease, be shot, or become enslaved by militias or traffickers. We are told that the situation is getting more desperate by the day.

Libya has long been dysfunctional in its ability to protect refugees, migrants, and trafficking victims. For example, for several years major news organizations have reported that sub-Saharan migrants and refugees have been sold in open markets as slaves in Libya, and that others have been held against their will under abominable conditions – often being tortured or killed – while ransom is demanded for their release. But the dysfunction appears now to have

reached a new level. We cannot allow innocent people to become or remain tragic victims of this inhuman circumstance.

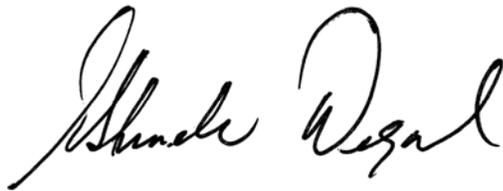
We are gratified that UNHCR has already given attention to the immediate crisis, as reported by the news media. But we urge that that body, together with the other addressees of this letter, reconfirm those efforts.

In light of the foregoing, we the undersigned:

- Call upon UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations, donor countries and the international community to ensure that all available resources be deployed to move these vulnerable individuals to safety – including by airlifting them to safe countries – and to otherwise administer aid and protection as soon as possible.
- Call upon the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration to monitor the overall situation more effectively, to promote comprehensive solutions for the thousands of refugees, migrants and trafficking victims warehoused in Libya, and to end their enslavement immediately.

With hope and profound gratitude, we the undersigned thank you in advance for whatever can be done.

Sincerely,



Eskinder Negash
President & CEO
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants



John Stauffer
President, The America Team for
Displaced Eritreans

International Organizations

ARAHA
Innovative Humanitarian Solutions - Ethiopia
Mercy Corps
RefugePoint
The Refugee Center Online
Torture Abolition and Survivors Support
Coalition

Eritrean Organizations

Bay Area Eritreans for Democratic Change
Eritrea Focus (an association of NGOs)
Eritrean Community in Houston
Eritrean-American Community Assn. of
Georgia
Forum for National Dialog
Freedom Friday (*Arbi Harnet*)
Human Rights Concern – Eritrea (HRCE)
Mahber Hwnet, Inc. - Delaware
Radio Assenna - London
Voice of Eritrea - Canada

National/Multi State Organizations

African Diaspora Network
ASSAF- Aid Organization for Refugees and
Asylum Seekers in Israel
AsylumConnect
Beloit College
Black Alliance for Just Immigration
Ethio Diaspora Communication
Ethiopian Community Development
Corporation
Hotline for Refugees and Migrants (Israel)
Human Rights First
International American Relief Society IARS
Kohomban
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Physicians for Human Rights - Israel
Southwest Key Programs
St. Andrew's Refugee Services, Egypt.

Local Organizations

Asylee Women Enterprise
CSI Refugee Programs
Deacons of the Wallingford (PA) Presbyterian Church
HIAS Pennsylvania
Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO)
International Institute of Akron
International Institute of Buffalo
International Institute of Los Angeles
International Institute of New England
International Institute of St. Louis
La Maestra Foundation Inc.
Mental Health Association of Middle Tennessee
Nationalities Service Center
Raleigh Immigrant Community
The Jerusalem African Community Center
YMCA International Services

State Organizations

Africana Communities Public Health Coalition
American Civic Association
Ebenezer Promotion
Intercultural Counseling Connection (Baltimore)
Journey's End Refugee Services Inc.
North Carolina African Services Coalition
RAICES