



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