

AN OPEN LETTER TO MINISTER FAWZIA HASHIM AND OTHERS:

March 8, 2019

The Honourable Tekea Tesfamichael, President of the National Union of Eritrean Women

The Honourable Fawzia Hashim, Minister of Justice

The Honourable Amna Nurhussain, Minister of Health

The Honourable Askalu Markarios, Minister of Labour & Human Welfare

THE STATE OF ERITREA,***ASMARA***

Dear President and Ministers,

To begin with, let us congratulate you and all women in our beloved country, Eritrea, on today's occasion of March 8, which is the public holiday internationally designated as Women's International Day, though we are not sure if you remember it or if you are allowed to do so by the gang you are serving. One thing we can vividly see is that, in Eritrea, where the Women's International Day is either ignored or at best deprived of its contents to a totally deformed form that could reduce it to a PFDJ propaganda charade, we have toothless women ministers and president of the women association, though they are veteran fighters, put for the mere show of gender inclusiveness.

The Eritrean people realistically know that there is nothing that distinguishes you from the crowd, qualifying you to hold these positions, except your personal loyalty to the Dictator. They also know that you are not mere political spectators but tools selling their souls to Dictator Isias, who still believes that women belong to the kitchen. Further, he has been demeaning women, dehumanizing them, turning them into grievors over the loss of their husbands, sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbours, and acquaintances, who died either after languishing in prison or drowned into the Mediterranean Sea or the Red Sea, met their final fate in Sinai Desert or Libya Desert, or when their

organs harvested (just to mention a few). Add to these numbers, those killed in the 1998-2000 border conflict with Ethiopia. As mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, and human beings, we know nothing could be more devastating than the grief over the loss of a son, daughter, parent, sibling or family member, exacerbated and complicated by feelings of injustice, deprivation of human rights, and basic freedoms.

Just to challenge your consciences, we see it appropriate to raise few questions about the level of tragedy caused by the gang you are serving and the danger hovering over the country:

- What does the April 14, 2017 suicide of the veteran fighter, Mehret Eyob, the wife of the G15 member, Beraki Gebresellasie, currently languishing in jail as an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience, mean to you?
- What is your feeling towards the conditions of veteran-fighter Aster Fissahatsion and other thousands of women currently languishing and tortured in prison?
- Can't you see how the indefinite military service wastes the youth and the productive age of our girls for nothing? When do they develop intellectual and career life of their choice? When do they build family and plan to live a settled life? What makes them think of social mobility and growth with the society instead of living on the edge looking for any opportunity to flee the country?
- Are you satisfied with the living conditions of our wounded warriors and the way they have been treated by your government?
- Are you familiar with the level of poverty, social injustice, and lack of equity the Eritrean women are experiencing daily?
- Have you ever thought about what is happening to our young girls in Sawa where they have been treated like sex slaves?

- Do you see the craziness shown in the closure of the only university and the current attempts to demolish the remaining post-secondary colleges and the impact of all these hostile actions on our women as students and mothers?
- Have you ever moved a finger to defend the rights of discriminated, humiliated and abused women, including widowed veteran-fighters who have been totally ignored, though they have kids to raise or parents to look after?
- What does the flow of events of national treason going on since seven months ago in Ethio-Eritrean relations mean to you?
- Can you see where your boss is taking the country and what that would mean to the women martyrs of our war of liberation?
- Instead of being loyal to the boss and fear him, don't you think that public trust dictates that you should be loyal to the people and fear them as your real employers?

Simply put, Eritrean women are the ones who have to bear the brunt of all tragedies, injustices, and socio-economic calamities witnessed in post-independent Eritrea, and that is continuing to expand daily. Though we do not know if you condemn all these crimes and high level national treason under your breath, by your silence, you are complicit in these crimes and acts of treason. At the same time, we never hesitate to tell you honestly that we were stunned, as all Eritrean women in and outside the country, to the extent of being speechless, when we saw you becoming ministers-turned-hostesses at the family residence of your boss at the time Dr. Abiy Ahmed, the Prime Minister of the former colonial Ethiopia, visited the butcher on July 9, 2018, serving coffee to the guests with pride. We had to wonder and the picture will remain etched in our memory forever, struggling to find an answer to the nagging question: How could proud veteran fighters, who had defeated the enemy and liberated the country, accept that level of humiliation and disgrace?

You may say we are safe and warm in the West, enjoying freedoms and real life, while we expect you to put your lives on the line by standing up and speaking out to be heard, or showing resilience when it comes to the political objectives of the war of liberation. This is not correct. We know exactly what it means to be a high-ranking official in Isias's Eritrea. However, the point is, despite personal challenges and the hostile environment in which you are working, you cannot be exempted from doing little things in advocating for women's rights, stressing the value of education as a means to end poverty and driving economic development, and encouraging women to pursue their personal dreams. Above all, refraining from going too far to please the narcissistic boss at the cost of your pride and the dreams your compatriots had fallen for is the minimum expected of you and the choice we advise you to make in order to avoid been accused of betraying the public trust. Are we expecting too much?

In few words, we just wanted to remind you that the day of reckoning is not too far and that you are expected to do only whatever pleases your conscience, and avoid tying yourself to the Devil or going out of your way to please him. We assure you that 2019 is going to be a very painful and critical year for your boss and his cronies on account of the pace in which we see national treason is advancing, given the limit of patience of any oppressed people, particularly the Eritrean people, who finally defeated the Ethiopian colonial power, let alone a gang of thugs. Before we leave it here, we are obliged to advise you, at least, to be wise enough not to create enough trouble for yourselves. The demise is coming. Good luck!

Yours faithfully,

Initiative Group of Eritrean women in Europe

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Eritrea Hdri Jeganuna Pal-Talk Room