



Eritrea: Hajji Ibrahim Younus Dies in Custody



Hajji Ibrahim Younus, who was arrested in October 2017 along with dozens of others owing to the long-simmering repercussions of the [Al-Diaa School protests](#), has died in Mai Serwa prison in Asmara, Eritrea, reportedly on 30th January 2019. He was in his late seventies, and a member of the executive committee of Al-Diaa School.

While in prison, he and others were not able or allowed to communicate with other people for about 15 months. He was not permitted visits by family or a lawyer; neither was he ever charged. Draconian prison conditions meant that he became unwell. He was seriously ill for about two months before his death but received no medical care. He allegedly died on 30th January 2019, leaving a wife and 4 children to be contacted by prison authorities with the news of his death, a viewing of his body and instructions to undertake the burial immediately, without informing their neighbours and community.

He was buried by his immediate family at 2p.m. on the 30th of January 2019. Those in the community who heard about his death attended the Muslim cemetery, believing the burial to be at 4pm. They were met by police who dispersed the crowd, telling them that he had already been buried.

Elizabeth Chyrum, Director of Human Rights Concern-Eritrea commented: “HRCE is deeply saddened by the news of Hajji Ibrahim Younus’ death and expressed our sympathy to his family. It is now very clear that, under the regime of Isaias Afwerki, religious persecution is focused not simply on the witnessing Christian community, but on all religious faiths, should they ever presume to challenge the imposed sole political authority of the one-party state by respecting any higher moral and spiritual

values. The Eritrean regime violates not only the right to religious education but the right to believe in any higher authority which challenges its monopoly of power.”

Background

In late 2017, the government sought to enforce a 2014 decision by the Ministry of Education that would transfer control of all schools, religious and secular, to local communities. The Al Diaa Islamic School was established in Asmara in the late 1960s and was run by parent committees as a private Islamic school. The implementation of the 2014 educational decree would mean that religious schools would have control transferred from the parent ‘trustees’ to local communities. The schools would become non-denominational and entrance would be open to the public. The possibility caused a rare display of public resistance against the Eritrean government.

On 20 October 2017, Hajji Musa Mohammed Nur, a man in his nineties and a deeply-respected Honorary President and board chairman of Al Diaa Islamic School, was arrested along with several others, for objecting to this development. This resulted in peaceful protest, but as the number of protesters increased, security personnel reportedly began to assault them heavy-handedly, ultimately responding to thrown stones with live ammunition. In March 2018, Hajji Musa Mohammed Nur died at the hospital to which had been transferred allegedly only moments before his death.

Eritrea is a one-party state in which national legislative elections have been repeatedly postponed and constitutional provisions protecting individual freedom ignored. With no independent judiciary, no independent civil society organisations or media outlets, the government restricts religious freedoms and perpetuates a national military service without any time limit for 18 to 50-year-olds. Under the leadership of President Isaias Afwerki, the Eritrean government proclaims that it truly believes in human rights and is proud of its human rights record. Nevertheless, [human rights activists worldwide were astounded when the international community voted for Eritrea to be elected as a member of the UN the Human Rights Council.](#)

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