

COORDINATION COMMITTEE ERITREAN DEMOCRATS IN ITALY

PRESS - RELEASE

On 4 May 2007, the European Commissioner for Development and Cooperation met the Eritrean President Issayas Afwerki in Brussels. After the meeting, the Commissioner Louis Michel declared "the European Union is planning to build stronger relations with Eritrea, hoping that the country will act as a key player for crisis-solving in the troubled Horn of Africa."

The motive declared by the commissioner confirms "despite accusations of Human Right violations the EU appreciates the diplomatic role played by Mr Issayas in the conflict of the Sudan and his decision to ban forced circumcision of young girls".

From our point of view this declaration underestimates the permanent repression of all Eritrean people, the mediation in the Sudan and banning circumcision doesn't justify promoting the Eritrean President to be a key partner of the region.

We would like to remind you that, when the Italian ambassador and diplomatic representative of EU in Eritrea Dr. Antonio Bandini was thrown out of the country on October 1, 2001, the European Parliament approved a resolution (N. P5_TA-2002-0070) condemning the action of the Eritrean regime.

Such resolution reads:

The European Parliament:

– *having regard to the statement by the Presidency of the Union expressing concern at the imprisonment of a number of prominent advocates of democratic reform,*
– *having regard to the Council statement expressing concern at the authoritarian trend in the country,*

1. *Condemns the human rights violations in Eritrea, in particular the crack-down on students in August 2001, as well as the arrest of the 11 dissidents and the shutting down of the independent press in September 2001;*

2. *Calls for the release of all political prisoners in general and the 11 public figures in particular, known as G15, who wrote an open letter to the President of Eritrea, criticising his authoritarian leadership of the country;*

3. *Calls for the ban on an independent press to be lifted;*

5. *Considers that these human rights abuses constitute a flagrant violation of the essential elements referred to in Article 9 of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement and warrant the immediate opening of consultations pursuant to Article 96 of the same Agreement;*

9. *Calls on the Council and the Member States to take a coordinated stance with regard to relations with Eritrea, to monitor closely the political situation in the country and to make the continuation of EU development cooperation conditional upon substantial progress being achieved in the areas of human rights and democratisation, in particular freedom of speech, press and assembly, and the holding of democratic elections;*

In 17th November 2004 the European Parliament issued the following declaration No. P6_TA(2004)0068 regarding the Human Right situation in Eritrea.

The European Parliament:

– *having regard to the ruling against Eritrea by the African Commission on Human Rights in March 2004,*

– *having regard to Rule 115(5) of its Rules of Procedure,*

A. deeply concerned by Eritrea's steadily deteriorating human rights situation, and dismayed by the manifest lack of cooperation from the Eritrean authorities, despite repeated appeals by international human rights organisations and NGOs,

B. whereas on 4 November 2004 the Eritrean security forces indiscriminately arrested thousands of young people and others suspected of evading military conscription, and fearing that the prisoners may risk torture and ill-treatment.....

In the last year the political situation has been getting worse. Terror is reigning in Eritrea, repression is at all levels while the Eritrean people are hostage of hunger, misery, malnutrition death and intimidation. Reliable sources coming from the Sudan, and even quoted by the BBC on 26th March 2007, claim that between 400-600 young Eritreans are escaping the harsh reality to reach the Sudan borders. International Human Right organizations Amnesty International, Human Right Watch, Reporters Sans Frontieres are reporting the alarming situation.

The most concerning aspect is that, while Commissioner Loius Michel was embracing the Eritrean President, RELEASE ERITREA was reporting that the Eritrean government had arrested 80 members of the Presbyterian congregation in Asmara for their religious belief. Prior to the arrest, the Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church Abune Antonions who was held in house arrest was illegally deposed from his position by the Eritrean government.

The situation of political instability in the Horn of Africa is very volatile, and thus the solution to the problem should be a coherent foreign policy with concrete political initiatives. However, this can not be achieved without taking account of the repression and human right abuses. Particular attention should be paid to the Eritrean regime currently in power which denies its own people all the basic rights declared by the UN.

We condemn the repressive regime of Eritrea and demand the European Union maintain a stand that is coherent with the resolutions previously approved by the European parliament.

Coordination Committee

Eritrean Democrats in Italy

Via Vallazze, 34 - 20132 Milan, Italy -

Email: eridemocrat@yahoo.it

Milan, 07 may 2007