

Eritrean Youth Renaissance (EYR)

Washington DC

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The Honorable Donald M. Payne
United States House of Representatives
2209 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-3010
DC Phone: 202-225-3436

Dear Congressman Payne,

We the member of Eritrean Youth Renaissance (EYR)¹ youth based non-for profit organization dedicated to defending the rights of all Eritreans, writing you to express our concerns in regards to your recent visit to Eritrea and its ramification.

Your recent visit to Eritrea didn't come as a surprise to us. We know the United States government doesn't work haphazardly. Given the deteriorating relationship of the United States and Eritrean governments and, especially the recent concern of the state department of the United States government regarding Eritrean government's involvement in sponsoring terrorism, one would expect to see rigorous diplomatic work. Being chairman of the house international relation subcommittee on Africa, and as our little research revealed, a frequent visitor to that area, who other than you could be the right choice to broker that diplomacy.

This being in its proper place, what made us a little uneasy is the Eritrean government's depiction of your visit. The government owned media used your visit for propaganda purposes. In one of its media reports, it said "Stating that he had closely observed the Eritrean government's effort to improve the people's standard of living and step up development, Congressman Donald Payne asserted that the United States respects the Eritrean government's stance and wishes to develop good relations with Eritrea." The Eritrean government's media is not credible; therefore we will defer any judgments. But, for the sake of the Eritrean people, and of course for your reputation and career, we would like to highlight some facts.

Dear Congressman Payne, are you aware of the Eritrean government's horrific human rights record? This we can tell, not as spectators from a distant land analyzing papers and conducting seminars. This is our life. Our people are living in constant fear, hopelessness and unrelenting misery. Thousand of prisoners held incommunicado- the list include eleven members of parliament and high ranking officials – seven years held incommunicado, over ten journalists and many ordinary citizens. The whole young generation is tied in slave like national service trained in a brutal military training camp, which some aptly call rape camp. Eritrea is the only country in Africa without independent press, no freedom of press, no freedom of worship, no freedom of association and even no freedom of work. Eritrea is a one party state with no independent judiciary, and the parliament was adjourned by the president four years back and never went back to session ever since. Eritrea is now a big gulag that tortures and kills its own citizens daily. All this, the work of a dictatorial regime.

Congressman Payne, as an ardent supporter of democracy we don't know what all these wicked acts

illicit in your conscience, but we are sure you will not be at home with that. In your visit, you met religious leaders of those who are still practicing with coercion. Many religions are closed and their leaders put behind bars, including some colleagues of those you met. We hope that our spiritual leaders had the courage to tell you exactly what is happening in Eritrea.

Dear Congressman, don't misunderstand us, we know the perils of democracy in a young nation, and we know the downside of democracy and the different schools of thought. Eritreans who were ready to forgo some of their inalienable democratic rights to build their nation but, the inhuman regime in Asmara wouldn't compromise an iota of its iron grip.

Congressman Payne, we are not talking about relenting, this regime has gone beyond that. The regime's excuse to mete-out all these atrocities is the border dispute with Ethiopia. We will not delve into this matter, since it's a classic dictator's attribute. No amount of threat real or imagined gives a carte-blanche to arbitrarily arrest and summarily kill your own people. Worst is, to talk about development in this situation, this is a mockery of human dignity.

We were very dismayed at your recent interview with VOA and we call upon you to be the voice of voiceless and promote democracy, justice and constitutional government in Eritrea. We urge you to use you're office & your influence on Eritrean government to unconditionally free all political & prisoner of conscience. We also appeal to you to call upon the Eritrean government to restore all inalienable rights and to immediately implement the constitution without any precondition.

We hope you'll seriously consider our concerns and pleas. We are ready & happy to discuss any of the issues raised here and we look forward to hearing back from you.

Injustice 2 One Injustice 2 All Eritrean!!

Respectfully,

Eritrean Youth Renaissance (EYR)
Washington DC.

¹ Eritrean Youth Renaissance (EYR) is a youth based non-for profit organization founded in early 2007 in Washington DC. EYR mission is to advocate for the rights of all Eritrean both at home and elsewhere. EYR encourages Eritrean youth to take the active role in bringing constitutional government and building a sustainable democracy in Eritrea.