

ተጋደሎ ሓርነት ኤርትራ
ሰው-ራዊ ባይቶ



جبهة التحرير الإرتريّة
المجلس الثوري

ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT (ELF-RC)

Executive Office, Social Affairs

**AN URGENT APPEAL ON BEHALF OF 10,000
ERITREAN REFUGEES AT GIRBA, EASTERN SUDAN**

To:

Mr. Chrysantus Ache (sent by email)

UNHCR Country Representative, Khartoum Sudan

Mr. Craig Sanders (by email),

Deputy Representative, Khartoum, Sudan

Mr. Lawrence Mgbangson (by email,)

Head of UNHCR Showak Office, East Sudan

The Sudan Coordination Office for Refugees, Khartoum, (hand delivery)

CC: Mr Antonio Guterres, UNHCR High Commissioner, Geneva

(sent by email); Pablo Mateu, UNHCR Chief for Reintegration and Local Settlement, Geneva, (by email)

January 17, 2008

Dear Sirs,

Please allow me to submit to your kind attention and urgent intervention to stop a decision that is likely to uproot a long settled Eritrean refugee community at Ghirba (or Khasmel-Ghirba) in Easter Sudan if they are relocated, as planned, to a drier zone where all livelihood amenities are lacking.

On 9 January 2208, a committee a representing the over 10,000 Eritrean refugees at the Ghirba camp in Eastern Sudan issued a memorandum addressed to the UNHCR local representative at your Shuwak office in which they appeal for reconsideration of a decision for the relocation of their 30-year old camp to Shegerab.

Sirs,

I, the undersigned head of Social Affairs in an Eritrean opposition organization struggling for change and democratization, am one of those who are closely involved in refugee problems in the Sudan and I wish to attest that the contents of the memorandum submitted to you by the refugee committee are true in their detail, and I very well know the consequences of implementing the decision will be disastrous to the poor refugee families settled in that area since 1978.

The Eritrean refugees at Ghirba camp, located in the banks of the Atbara River, are fully integrated in the area and many of them have become self-supporting through small scale agricultural activities. Their children go to vocational and secondary schools in Ghirba, services which are not available at the proposed camp of Sheberab. The latter village, with its 30,000 residents, lacks all services and facilities including drinking water, decent shelter, public health and schools. Food rations to refugees in Eastern Sudan have been either cut totally or reduced to about a quarter of previous levels and the food situation of the present Ghirba residents will be very bad, to say the least, if they are taken away from their present habitat where they had been well integrated in all aspects of life.

You are very well aware of the failed experience in Eastern Sudan in relocating residents of the Semsem refugee camps to Umgurgur, and we hope that that unfortunate and sad lesson will not be repeated to the disadvantage of the current residents of Ghirba refugee camp.

I am therefore submitting to Your Excellencies this modest message on behalf of myself as well as on behalf of the Alliance of Eritrean Red Cross/Red Crescent Society (A/ERCS) and colleagues working among refugees to kindly intervene in this matter and help rescind the decision of moving the Eritrean refugee community at Ghirba to Shegerab. I am also taking the liberty of copying to you (see below) an English translation from Arabic of the Memo submitted to your representative at Showak in Eastern Sudan.

Sincerely yours,

*Gime Ahmed (samikas1@yahoo.com),
Head of the Office of Social Affairs of the ELF-RC,
and Board Member of the Alliance of Eritrean
Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies (A/ERCS)
Head Office: Khartoum, Sudan (00249.182.470.122)*

Refugee Committee Memorandum on the Decision To Relocate Eritrean Refugees from Ghirba to Shegerab

To:

The Representative of Refugee Affairs at Shuwak, Eastern Sudan
The UNHCR Representative at the Showak office,
(Cc. to other concerned bodies)
January 2008

Dear Sirs,

After warm greetings, we submit this message:

As it is known, the Ghirba (Khashmal-Ghirba) camp was established in 1978 for Eritrean refugees who were originally urban dwellers. Due to their existence in this area for 30 years, the refugee families were able to build decent shelter for themselves in a locality that provided a few basic human needs for existence. However, it need be noted that, since 2005, residents of the Ghirba refugee camp faced the following constraints:

1. Much reduced water supply for limited productive activities
2. Shortage of medical supplies and skilled staff in the local dispensary.
3. Cutting substantially the food ration from previous 17kg/month per person.
4. Reducing the number of food beneficiaries from 9,350 to 2,600 “vulnerable” persons.

A classification of refugees was supposedly made on the basis of vulnerable persons and those who are able to support themselves. But what happened was the exact opposite. Teams of camp residents were assigned to investigate the real vulnerable persons and their detailed reports were submitted to the concerned offices at Showak. To this day, no action was taken – not even a reply to the findings by refugee committees.

[But the worst is now befalling Ghirba]. From repeated recent visits to Ghirba of representatives of the refugee Commissioner in the Khashmal-Ghirba area, it is now learned that we, Eritrean refugees settled in Ghirba, will be uprooted from the camp and soon be removed to Shegerab. The old camp at Ghirba (with all what the refugees established there in 30 years) will be handed over to the local authorities.

Dear Sirs,

With this Memorandum of the entire refugee community at Ghirba, we present to your kind consideration a list of our urgent demands and justifications against the enforcement of the decision on our removal from Ghirba.

First: Relocation of the Ghirba refugees to Shegerab will cause severe problems to the affected community because of the following:

1. Absence of basic services and facilities at Shegerab
 - Shortage and/or absence of elementary, secondary and vocational schools at Shegerab.
 - Lack of sufficient potable water at Shegerab.
 - Lack of sufficient decent shelter for refugee households.

2. The acute shortage of medical services for the residents of Shegerab themselves, and the concern of what this would mean with the relocation of Ghirba residents to Shegerab.
3. The unbearable pain and shock of uprooting Ghirba residents after 30 years of settled life in this locality.

Secondly: This latest decision to relocate Ghirba residents to Shegerab camp opens to memory the recent experience and still prevailing bad situation of those relocated from Semsem camps to the Umgurgur camp. And at this juncture, we the refugee committee ask: if the United Nations refugee agency that witnessed the renewed day-to-day suffering of the relocated refugees of Semsem camps is to abandon its international responsibilities towards Ghirba (and other) refugees, who else is supposed to take care of them? Who will provide relocated [Ghirba] refugees the basic daily sustenance? Who will look into legal compensation based on a just assessment of (at least) their material losses because of the relocation from the original camp? Who will make them self-supporting by providing the required means of production (in the new locality)?

In conclusion, we the committee members stress the fact that the decision of relocation refugees from Ghirba to Shegerab is opening old agonizing wounds anew to Eritrean refugees. We are convinced that the plight of the Eritrean people and their struggle will end only when Eritreans establish a common homeland that welcomes citizens under a system of democratic governance where freedom and justice prevail.

Committees representing
Elders, Women and Youth of
Ghirba Refugee Camp for Eritreans
9 January 2008