

22 September, 2012

Can a Leopard Change its skin?
An Open Letter to the Honorable John Baird Minister of foreign affairs Canada
By Ghirmay Yeibio

Dear Mr. Baird,

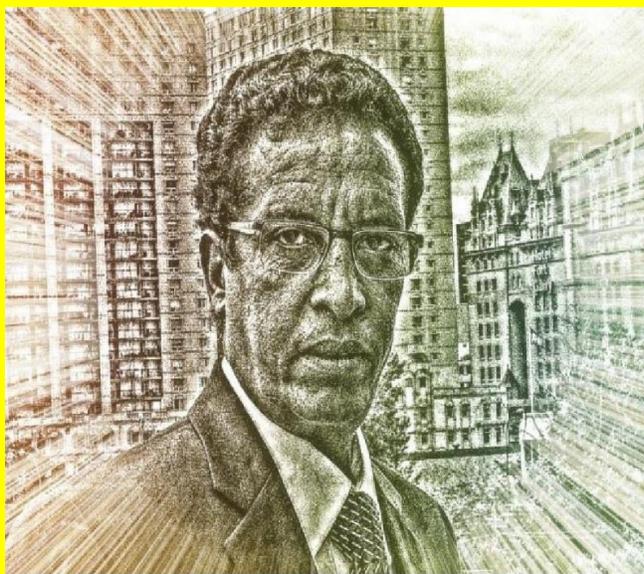
Please accept my sincere greetings and best wishes from Winnipeg.

I am writing to you today regarding the diplomatic note you sent to Eritrea advising that Mr. Semere Gebremariam's accreditation would only be renewed once Ottawa had received written assurance he had stopped the tax scheme. I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to you and through you to the government of Canada for your concern about the safety of Eritrean Canadians and for this momentous decision.

While I believe that Canada's decision to threaten to close the consulate office of one of the most repressive regime in the world is a step in the right direction, but given the track record of the Asmara regime I am of the opinion that it would not produce any results. The only way to protect Eritrean Canadians and their families from harassment, intimidation and persecution is to close the diplomatic mission for good. There is no other alternative.

The UN Security Council has clearly stated and condemned the Asmara regime in its resolution last year for using threats of violence, fraud and other illicit means to collect taxes outside of Eritrea including through the consulate in Canada. Furthermore it has established unequivocally that the regime uses funds thus obtained from the Diaspora tax to procure arms for and training terrorist groups in the horn of Africa and undermining peace and reconciliation in Somalia.

Various human rights organizations have been reporting for years now that the coercive fund raising operation from Diaspora Eritreans is a crucial source of revenue for the Asmara regime. This is an established fact.



Ghirmay Yeibio

Since 2009, I have been writing numerous letters to your good office regarding the intimidation harassment and the illicit fund raising scheme of the Eritrean consulate in Canada and requesting the closure of the diplomatic mission. I feel vindicated that the UN monitoring group on Eritrea and Somalia's report backs me up and proves without a shade of doubt what the Eritrean consulate and its satellite communities -- like the one in Winnipeg - - have been up to so far, unchecked.

In my letters I have tried to stress that duty of Eritrean Consulates and its staff around the world including the one in Canada, is not to enhance bilateral relations but rather to ensure complete control of the Diaspora through harassment, intimidation and spying, and milk the Diaspora for funds that would

eventually be used to strengthen the regime and finance terrorists.

Moreover, I have gone to extra length to explain that the only language the Asmara regime understands is punitive action, sanctions and force. Time and again we have witnessed that the Asmara regime has to be cornered and its hands twisted before it is forced to do the right thing. This regime is the most belligerent and non repentant regime of all time and the most repressive regime that the world has ever seen.

Dear Mr. Baird,

Eritrea is a poor nation with a dilapidated economy exhibiting decay. Half its population lives on less than US\$1.00 a day and about one third are living in extreme poverty on the brink of starvation. Per Capita GDP is less than US\$130. Fiscal deficit; depleted foreign currency reserve and the absence of export are the hallmarks of the Eritrean economy.

In the absence of any formal economy the Asmara regime heavily depends on the 2% coercive expatriate tax, remittance by the Eritrean Diaspora and a long chain of illegal trade operations including weapons and human trafficking. Therefore, to believe that a mere warning would deter the Asmara regime from its coercive fund raising activities is simply vain.

In an interview with the National Post on 21 September, 2012 the Eritrean consul to Canada has said in very clear terms that his government would continue collecting the Diaspora tax from Eritrean Canadians. Mr. Semere Gebremariam also arrogantly added "We have to tax our people, it is our right," --- There you go; we have it direct from the horse's mouth.

As the good book says "can a leopard change its skin?" hence, it would be vain to expect that the Eritrean Consulate would stop its illicit activities of spying, harassing and intimidation just because of a threat of closure. I have a nagging doubt that the Canadian government has not yet fully understood the true nature and character of the Asmara regime and does not know who it is dealing with.

Dear Mr. Baird,

The Asmara regime is an ordinary criminal gang which masquerades as a government of a sovereign nation. It is no more or no less than a mafia organization. Since when has threat and warning ever produced a positive result with organized criminals?

This is a regime that runs a multimillion dollar arms trafficking industry through a highway running from the Eritrean highlands across the Sudan into the Sinai desert and Palestine delivering arms to militant groups.

This is a regime which is actively engaged in human smuggling and delivering asylum seekers to Bedouin gangs, who use electrocution, rape and murder to extort tens of thousands of dollars from relatives in the Diaspora for their release. This is a regime that is engaged in selling and delivering its own citizens, who happen to be refugees in the Sudan, to Bedouin gangs for organ harvesting.

The UN - Eritrea and Somalia monitoring group has named General Teklai Kifle "Manjus", commander of Eritrea's western military zone, as the mastermind behind these operations. The monitoring Group further confirmed that "A small clique of military and government officials runs the state and General Teklai Kifle is one of the most influential. With activity on this scale over such a long time you have to assume the knowledge and tacit approval of other parts of the Eritrean leadership". What more proof does Canada need to close the diplomatic mission of Eritrea in order to protect its own citizens of Eritrean extraction?

This is a regime which is headed by President Isayas Afeworki, who is the God father of terrorists in the horn of Africa and a front man for Islamist fundamentalist individuals and governments in the Arab world. The Asmara regime is a safe haven for known terrorists and rebel organization of the region which have confirmed links to Al Qaeda, and who are the perpetrators of untold suffering and misery in the region. It arms and trains Al Shabaab and Hisbul Islam militant organizations by airlifting plane loads of weapons and armaments.

This is a regime that has rapidly drifted away from mainstream diplomacy, heading towards a small club of nations opposing anything defined as "Western interests".



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad with Eritrean President Isayas Afeworki in Tehran on May 19, 2008.

It has developed a very good relation with Iran and has been assisting and cooperating with Iran to transfer weapon shipments to Houthi factions in Yemen through Eritrean Red Sea coastal territory.

Moreover, in June 2009 President Isayas Afeworki of the Asmara regime has gone on record ridiculing the IAEA's and Western nations' demands that Iran stop suspicious parts of its nuclear program in accordance with international treaties. He was quoted as saying "The US, which possesses nuclear weapons and have used it against other nations, is not authorized to specify who should or should not take advantage of nuclear technology".

Given the current standoff with Iran there is a great likelihood that the Asmara regime could play a negative role in the Iran crisis.

This is a regime that planned a massive attack on an African Union summit in Ethiopia in January 2011 that was designed to make Addis Ababa like Baghdad. An investigation by the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea suggests that the plot was genuine, and says it represented "a qualitative shift in Eritrean tactics" in the Horn of Africa.

Dear Mr. Baird,

Simply put, what we have in our midst is a diplomatic mission representing a terrorist regime led by a deranged and unhinged dictator, which would not bat an eye to slaughter over 30 African heads of states and turn a city of 4 million into a blood bath. We are dealing here with a lunatic.

On the home front, the people of Eritrea are currently living in bondage reminiscent to that of the slave era in the hands of their very own government. Abuse, imprisonment, torture, arbitrary detention, summary execution, hunger, destitution, mass exodus, despair and fear have become the trademark of their young nation and a tragic fact of life to all Eritreans of all walks of life. As a result Eritreans are leaving their nation in tens of thousands. One third of the Eritrean population has now become stateless sojourners and refugees scattered all over the world.

The case of the closure of the Eritrean Embassy in Canada should be based on the character and track record of the Asmara regime which has so far refused to abide by international and regional treaties, standards and accepted norms and continues to play a spoiler role in the horn of Africa and beyond. The Asmara regime should be recognized as a threat to regional and international peace just like Iran.

By closing the diplomatic mission, Canada would also be sending a message to the Asmara regime that the brutalization of its citizens is unacceptable and that human rights, civil liberties and the rule of law are God given rights of the Eritrean people.

To expect that the Eritrean diplomat in Canada and the terrorist regime of Asmara would heed to a simple threat of closure is naïve. Therefore, I once more again humbly request you to take steps that goes beyond "expressing concern" and "threat of closure" and stand up to the moment in both words and deed by closing the consulate.

The closure of the Eritrean diplomatic mission and the expulsion of its representatives from Canada are long overdue.

Sincerely Yours,

Ghirmay S. Yeibio