

by **Mengesha Yohannes**

Why have the sanctions imposed on Eritrea proved ineffective?

The United Nations Security Council has imposed successive sanctions on Eritrea for providing political, financial, and logistical support to insurgent groups in Somalia, and for illegally invading and occupying the sovereign territory of Djibouti. The sanctions were a response to the way Eritrea, through its embassies, had provided support to Al-Shabaab and other groups fighting against the UN-recognized Somali Transitional Federal Government, as well as attempted to organize the bombing of African Union Head of States Summit in Addis Ababa. Because the Eritrean regime ignored these sanctions and continued its destabilizing activities, posing a threat to international peace and security including the attacks on Djibouti and a refusal to acknowledge its activities, the Security Council then imposed a second set of sanctions on Eritrea in October 2010.

Despite these very clear indications of United Nations concern over Eritrea's activities, the sanctions have nevertheless remained almost ineffectual, largely due to the lack of due diligence and commitment to the monitoring mechanisms by the Sanctions' Committee and by member states. Although the international community appears to have tried to understand the continuously belligerent behavior of the Eritrean government, it has however made little effort to implement the decisions. The result is that the Eritrean government has simply not bothered to try to give up on its destabilizing activities in the region as a whole.

According to the Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group (SEMG)'s midterm briefing, issued in February this year, the Eritrean Government has repeatedly violated UN Security Council Resolution 1907 (2009), pertaining to the import and export of military equipment and external assistance to its armed forces. In fact, it is also clear, the Eritrean government is still a key player in the network of arms smuggling rings between Yemen and Somalia. The SEMG confirmed that Eritrean Authorities continued to violate the arms embargo through the smuggling of weapons and ammunition for commercial sale through Sudan. Notably, the recently expelled

ex-President of the Central Africa Republic, Mr. Bozize also blamed the Eritrean government for its support to the Seleka rebel group which overthrew him.

The only area where it seems the sanctions had been largely effective appears to have been in connection with the Eritrean Air Force where it seems most of the aircraft remain non-functional due to a lack of maintenance and spare parts. In other areas, there was little indication that the sanctions had been effective and considerable evidence of a lack of compliance in implementation.

In fact, the Monitoring Group recently proposed the implementation of a 'due diligence' procedure in respect of UN Security Council Resolution 2023. This mainly focused on gold mining revenue and a freezing of the illicit 2% taxation on Eritreans in the Diaspora, a tax that routinely involves threats, harassment, intimidation and imprisonment against the individuals concerned or their relatives in Eritrea in the event of default. However, so far, the Sanctions Committee has been so negligent as to have apparently forgotten about the measures intended to ensure that mining revenues were not used to violate the arms embargo.

The other area of failure of the sanctions is over the lack of commitment of member states. Indeed, any analysis of the effectiveness of sanctions through determining the economic or political impact on Eritrea would be likely to come to the conclusion that the sanctions almost appear meaningless. The UN Security Council made it clear that States themselves should take measures to introduce due diligence guidelines to prevent the provision of services or investment in the extractive sector from contributing to Eritrea's violation of the relevant resolutions. States have, conspicuously, failed to implement this. Eritrea, itself, has continuously denied any allegation that it has violated the resolutions, and has repeatedly tried to persuade Council members that the sanctions that have been imposed on it should be lifted, even though it has not in fact changes any of the relevant policies against which the sanctions were directed.

The issue of sanctions, of course, has hardly been an immediate concern of most member states but rather something of marginal concern to themselves. That is actually the case in most instances of UN sanctions. However, this should not affect the issue. Eritrea is a new, small and rather unimportant nation, but in its twenty years of existence it has become best known for its aggressive and destabilizing activities throughout the Horn of Africa. The most militarized state

per capita in the world, with well over 10% of its population in the military and another 25% fleeing the country and dispersing across the world, the remainder of its population face the continual threat of arrest and torture in more than three hundred secret prisons without any due process of law. The government continues to harass, imprison and kill the relatives of those in the diaspora who fail to pay their taxes to the regime, which in turn continues to use the funds to carry out its efforts to destabilize the region and Ethiopia in particular.

In fact, in the last year or two, Eritrea has become attractive for the development of its gold and other mineral resources. It also has some geo-political importance for its Red Sea coastline. As a result, some members of the Security Council appear to have become unenthusiastic about their responsibility for the implementation of sanctions, and appear prepared to ignore the overwhelming evidence of the continuous and widespread abuse of human rights in Eritrea, including the use of slave labor in the mining industry. In addition, fatigue among the super powers has apparently helped to obstruct implementation of the sanction.

Actually, there can be no doubt that the issue of the problems of the Horn of Africa should be of interest of all nations, especially for those who have unequivocally decided to fight against international terrorism. The main objectives of the sanctions resolutions against Eritrea were to support the fight against terrorism as well as ensure stability in Somalia and the whole region. As the evidence has repeatedly shown and as people from the region have repeatedly testified, it has been the Eritrean government which has given continuous, and excessive, support to terrorist groups in the Horn of Africa. I would also point out that this has also had a major impact on the dynamics of maritime security as well. Member states really ought to more aware of all of this and prepared to implement sanctions fully and effectively.

The periodic reviews of reports delivered by the UN Monitoring Group in Somalia and Eritrea provide directives and procedures. In the absence of any effort by the government to Eritrea to change its ways, they really need to be implemented. Indeed, the international community must give proper attention to the implementation of the sanctions imposed on Eritrea; the Sanction Committee must follow up and implement the due diligence reporting procedures proposed by the Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group. The failure to implement the UN sanctions reflects on far more than the effectiveness of the Sanctions Committee. It also impacts on the very

authority of the United Nations, as well as on the peace and security for the whole of the Horn of Africa region.