

Neglected Irob Abductees

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Where are the Irob people who were abducted by Eritrean forces more than a decade ago (1998-2000)? Why do the Ethiopian government and international community failed to utter a single word about these innocent abductees for last 12 years? As a native Irob, who is duty bound to advocate for his people's well-being and safety, the author has decided to write a few words about the Irobs kidnapped by the Eritrean regime and, at the same time, neglected by the Ethiopian government.

The Irob people and many others inhabiting the Ethio-Eritrean border have suffered horrible ordeal including abduction and forced removal from their homeland, under the occupation of the Eritrean armed forces. In 1998, when the Eritrean regime instigated a conflict and invaded the Irobland, Irob militia and people were the last defense against the Eritrean advance which occurred in the absence of the Ethiopian national armed forces. They held off the enemy for five days. However, the Eritrean forces, armed with heavy artillery, supported by tanks were able to control most of the area until they were evicted, two years later, by Ethiopian Defense forces.

When Eritrean forces occupied Irobland (1998-2000), they kidnapped more than 100 innocent Irobs and their whereabouts is unknown until today for solid 12 years. Besides that, their humanitarian condition is not yet addressed either by the Ethiopian government or international community. They are always in the hearts and minds of the Irob people and will remain registered in every Irob people's heart till the Eritrean regime returns them back to their home place, Irobland. Though such atrocities may have been committed against innocent civilians before, the Irob abductees case is unique in that it has received no attention either from our own, Ethiopian, government or international actors who have the duties and responsibilities to speak in their behalf.

There can be no argument how evil it is to abduct and cause suffering to innocent people who have done no harm to anyone. It is so appalling how these individuals had been taken away from their homes. No one of the Irob abductees had ever been a member of any political party or involved in any military organization. Most of these people were heads of families and by profession they were engaged in farming and in cattle rearing. As a result of their disappearance their families have been suffering ever since. The spouses and children of these abductees have waited for over twelve (12) years to hear news of their whereabouts. After all these years, they still have hope, but their eyes are never dry. They wonder if their loved ones are alive and if they will ever see them again.

It makes me wonder how Eritrean regime can justify holding these people for so long without any criminal charge against them and how the world can watch this horrendous crime let go by. The international community has been expected to hold the Eritrean regime to account for the crimes it committed against these civilians. But, influential

world powers and human right activists are simply watching this horrendous crime being perpetrated by Eritrean regime against innocent abductees. These powers are giving a deaf ear to the cry of these victims. More than this, it makes me wonder why Ethiopian government never said a word about these abductees until today. It is so ridiculous and mind-boggling. The government which claims to be elected by its people should safeguard that particular people's interest and be voice for them. But unfortunately that doesn't work when it comes to the Ethiopian government.

While other countries fight for their individual citizen's right to make sure that their nationals are safe both at home and abroad, the Ethiopian government does not show any care for the safety and security of its citizens. The Ethiopian government never fights for its own citizens' rights; instead it fights hard to make sure that it stays in power long. For the Ethiopian government officials, to follow individuals who are suspected of some minor demeanors related to their power equation is more important than to search for the whereabouts of over a hundred abducted civilians of their own citizens. If the Ethiopian authorities had any concern for their kidnapped citizens, they would have inquired Eritrea to release and repatriate all the prisoners detained according to the so-called Algiers Agreement they signed in 2000.

It is unfortunate to learn that Ethiopia is the only country in the world where its government intentionally ignores its citizens abducted by a foreign enemy state. From day one, we Irobs have been appealing to our government and the relevant International organizations such as the Red Cross and Amnesty International to no avail. However, we have a duty and obligation to continue advocating on behalf of those abducted victims. This advocacy work is, and will be, targeted towards international actors and we are working hard to let our voices heard by those actors. Irob Community is expressing deep felt pain regarding these abductees. The victims' families are filled with tears of pain and agony for the last 12 years. Neither the Ethiopian people nor the rest of the world is informed about these victims by the Ethiopian government or the international organizations. These people are Ethiopian citizens and the Ethiopian government must be accountable for not taking appropriate action regarding these citizens.

Dear fellow Irobs and friends of Irob people, we must do everything in our power to free our abductees from the hell that they are forced into. We should unite and fight until we know the whereabouts of our beloved ones. We should fight and pressurize Ethiopian government until it recognizes their disappearance (abduction). We are their only mouth and voice.

The Irob people have published a partial list of the names of the abductees and dates of abduction of those hostages and appealed to all authorities who have the ability and obligation to do something in this regard. Unfortunately, our appeals have fallen on deaf ears as no tangible steps have been taken by any responsible authorities to ensure the safety and release of the abductees who have been detained unjustifiably for solid 12 years. Human rights activists and international community must do whatever they can to know about the situations of these innocent victims and take steps for their release.

The writer thus once again calls on the Ethiopian government, the African Union, the United Nations and all other international powers; and all human rights organizations to demand that the Eritrean government account for the whereabouts of the Irob abductees. The writer calls on the Eritrean government to account for the kidnapped Ethiopian citizens by its armed forces. The real number of such victims is actually much more than what is listed in the link attached below and they all need to be accounted for without any preconditions. The writer, on behalf of Irob community, calls on international human rights groups and influential world powers to follow carefully the case of these innocent victims; and pressurize the Eritrean regime to release them. The writer also urges and calls upon all Ethiopians and Ethiopian political and civic organizations to put pressure on the Ethiopian government and to appeal to International Community to do something about Ethiopian Irob hostages languishing in the concentration camps of the Eritrean regime. The Ethiopian government should not do any negotiations with Eritrean regime without securing the safe return of these innocent abducted civilians. The Ethiopian government should have been in forefront in demanding the release of its own citizens.

Finally, the writer strongly urges the international powers and human rights groups (such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International) to be a voice for the voiceless Irob abductees and investigate the status of the Irob hostages taken from their homes and ask for their unconditional release. The writer would also like to remind the Ethiopian government to recognize the plight of these innocent civilians and join us in pressuring the Eritrean government to reveal their whereabouts and release them.

We, the Irob people, will never stop calling for the release of our abducted community members! Please see a partial list of the Irobs kidnapped and held by the Eritrean forces in the following link: http://www.irobmablo.org/Irob_Abductees_English.pdf

May justice and peace for all prevail in the New Year!