

An Open Appeal to the Prime Minister of Ethiopia

May 14, 2012

His Excellency Mr. Melles Zenawi
Prime Minister
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
P. O. Box 1031, Addis Ababa- Ethiopia

Your Excellency:

The Irob Rights Advocacy Association (hereafter IRAA) is writing this open letter to draw attention to problems related to the Ethio-Eritrean war of 1998-2000 and its aftermath. This letter will address the impact of the Algiers agreement and the Hague decision on the Irob and other border area Ethiopian citizens; the plight of Ethiopians abducted by the Eritrean rouge regime; and the perplexed migration of the Irob youth and the heinous crimes being committed against them by the unscrupulous human traffickers.

As your Excellency is well aware of, in 2007 Gregorian calendar 5 European tourists and 13 Ethiopians were abducted allegedly by the Eritrean Government. At that time, the Ethiopian government quickly warned the Eritrean regime with serious consequences. All European abductees were freed in a short time thereafter. Unfortunately, after the release of the European tourists we have heard no word from your government about those missing Ethiopians yet to date. Again, on January 16th 2012, after five European tourists were killed and two injured, two Germans and two Ethiopians were kidnapped by the attacking gunmen at Erta-Ale, in the Afar region. As it was in the previous abduction case regarding foreigners, the Ethiopian government's rhetoric against the regime in Asmara was sharpened and it even looked as if war between the two countries was on the horizon. Anyhow, the kidnapped Europeans were released but again the two poor Ethiopians are yet unaccounted for.

First, IRAA would like to pay its condolences to those Europeans who lost their loved ones under these ambiguous circumstances. It equally appreciates the vociferous stand the Ethiopian government took against the rogue regime in Asmara in order to secure the release of the kidnapped Europeans. This time again, however, the Ethiopian citizens are left to their fate; hence our appreciation is not without reservation. Generally speaking, the handling of the Ethiopian abductees' case is totally flawed and irresponsible. There are Ethiopian civilian men, women, young and old, including clergy, who are still unaccounted for after being abducted from their residences by the same regime in Asmara during the Ethio-Eritrean border war of 1998-2000. In addition to that, there are 15 Ethiopians mentioned above kidnapped in 2007 and 2012; and, of course, hundreds kidnapped during last 12 years from various localities bordering Eritrea whose fate is still unknown as well. IRAA supported the Ethiopian government's aggressive posturing to get the kidnapped foreigners released; on the other hand, it is very much dismayed with the indifference the same government showed towards the abducted Ethiopian citizens.

Mr. Prime Minister, once while responding to a question posed by a member of the Ethiopian parliament, you argued that the blood of a victim of terrorists, whether she/he is black or white, remains always red. Regrettably, Ethiopians are not so fortunate to see these words put into practice. Hence, Ethiopians should not be blamed if they question the sincerity of your public statement mentioned above.

There is a valid reason behind this suspicion, Mr. Prime Minister. There are Ethiopian abductees and prisoners of war suffering in the hands of the Eritrean Regime since 1998. These abductees are Ethiopian tax-paying citizens who are called upon to defend whenever their motherland's interest is at

stake. Despite this, the Ethiopian government is leaving no stone unturned to get the European tourists released, but, after all these years, no word is heard from the same government about the missing Ethiopian citizens. This contradicts the position you entertained in your response to the parliamentarian. It is as if you are telling us that the blood of every human is red; but, some humans' blood is redder than others'. Otherwise, the minimum your government would have done was to show equal sympathy to all the abductees and exerted equal action to have them released. In the absence of equal sympathy and action, your affirmation that "all humans have red blood" is nothing more than hypocrisy.

IRAA believes that Ethiopian citizens deserve, at a minimum, equal if not more attention than those who have strong governments to fight for their release. Governments are judged by the heart and mind they have for their citizens, not by the good words that they utter. We can safely say that your government takes the European abductees case very seriously, while ignoring Ethiopians who are kidnapped around the same time with them. This is a clear manifestation of your government's prioritization of the necessity of appeasing donor nations. Unfortunately, your government fails to respect the responsibility it is bestowed with to take care of Ethiopian citizens. The priority of a self-prided and civilized nation must presuppose the respect of its citizens with all means possible including muscle-flexing when necessary and appropriate. In a country where a responsive government exists, organizations like IRAA would have been the last to voice for these voiceless victims. A government that discriminates against its citizen can never be trustworthy. Mr. Prime Minister, IRAA calls upon your government to take the Ethiopian abductees case, at a minimum, as equal to the case of abducted European tourists.

Dear Mr. Prime Minister and other Ethiopian authorities, the border case and the condition of border area citizens is another totally disregarded matter. The devastation that the Eritrean invasion caused to our nation and especially to the areas that were under occupation for two long years is immense. Looting and demolishing of schools, primary public health posts, and entire towns like Zalambesa; and desecrating and destroying churches are some of the offenses not to be overlooked. The communities under occupation have sustained much more devastation that IRAA has tried to partially list in its previous numerous press releases. Therefore, since repeating the details here can be superfluous, we prefer to refrain from going deeper into explaining the incalculable material and psychological devastations that the communities in question have sustained. To sum it up with a phrase, the trauma the above mentioned communities sustained is deep and lasting. This is something a government who has its citizens at heart can vividly see.

Mr. Prime Minister, to try here to bring to your attention the details of human and material loss that Ethiopia sustained to reverse the Eritrean invasion would be futile because the whole data is on your shelves. We do not think that the number of lives paid to ensure the sovereignty of the nation is beyond your understanding unless you intentionally prefer to ignore it. Setting aside the briefly touched upon issue of war related destruction here, we would like to put our focus on the aftermath of the war, taking Irob-land as our case study.

The question we would like to pose is: Where is Ethiopia's political leadership? The Ethiopian defense forces and the Ethiopian people paid the ultimate price to secure Ethiopian sovereignty. Enormous human life and material resource were sacrificed. We thank our Ethiopian heroes and heroines who secured our territories through their sacrifices. To sum it up, the people and the military had done what is expected of them. But, unfortunately, the hard won victory by the Ethiopian people in the battlefield is made irrelevant by the political leadership when they took the agenda to Algiers unnecessarily. In our opinion, the Algiers agreement transforms a victory into a disastrous defeat for our nation. Going to Algiers and signing such a defeatist document which favored the belligerent regime in Asmara after conclusively winning the battle is absolutely incomprehensible. Prof. Beyene Pertos, who was a member

of parliament at the time, had posed a very important question regarding the validity of the agreement signed after winning the war. He expressed his worries about the phrase “final and binding” included in the document. His concern was not addressed with the weight it deserves. To the contrary, he was lambasted by you, Mr. Prime Minister. His worries, however, proved to be correct and your justification wrong. Mr. Prime Minister, bear in mind that the concern of Prof. Beyene was shared by millions of Ethiopians and was clearly expressed by demonstrations and writings. Therefore, your reply to the professor was by implication lambasting the millions who shared his concern.

Subsequent to the Algiers agreement, the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC) was established and consequentially on April 12 2002 its ruling was announced. Following the EEBC deliberation, the then Ethiopian foreign minister Ato Seyoum Mesfin was quick to tell the Ethiopian people to come out in millions to the streets to celebrate the “victory achieved at the court of law” in The Hague by adding “the victory booked in the war front is repeated and upheld in the court of justice too.” Soon the EEBC’s ruling was released and the public got a chance to know the truth. The document revealed Ato Seyoum’s victory claim to be disastrously wrong. The hope and jubilation of the Ethiopian people were soon evaporated. It had been proved that Ethiopia lost the victory it earned on the battlefield. Had there been a dedicated patriotic political leadership, the result would have been totally different. If Ethiopia had an astute political leadership it would never have contemplated going to Algiers to sign a document that would not assure its national sovereignty. Besides, to exhume and bring to life invalid 1900, 1902 and 1908 “treaties” was wrong and consequently brought shame and devastation to the whole nation. This damage must be reversed and our nation has to get out of this disgrace because its impact on the entire nation and particularly on minorities like the Irob and Kunama nationalities is immense.

IRAA would like to emphasize the devastating effect regarding the survival of the Irob people as a community because of the Algiers agreement and the decision of The Hague. Hence, IRAA is consciously following every bit of information coming out about the border demarcation. Ceding a large part of the Irob territory to Eritrea means letting the Irob people wither out. To allow the division of this small community between two nations means denying it the right to preserve its identity and promoting its gradual disappearance. Therefore, to divide the indivisible Irob minority is an irresponsible act which should not be tolerated by any standard. Irobs deserve to remain Ethiopians and undivided as they have been for centuries. IRAA again appeals to you and your government to annul the irresponsible decision of The Hague.

Dear Mr. Prime Minister, one more concern we would like to call your attention to is the desperate and perilous exodus of the Irob youth. Since 1980s, Irobs have been randomly trying to emigrate from the region they dearly love. The reason for their emigration has been multifaceted. The primary causes of the flight are political and economic problems that intermittently manifested in their area. After the fall of the military regime, there was a renewed hope and optimism of change for the better in the hearts and minds of our people. The situation, however, is not going the way they had hoped it would. In Irob-land, the economic situation remains at its all time worst. No development activities are observable and, as a result, unemployment is rampant. Thus, the youth is forced to become prey to unscrupulous human traffickers. The number of the Irob youth drowning in the Red Sea while trying to cross to Arab countries in search of better lives is staggering. Nowadays, an exodus to Israel is also at its full swing. Those murderous human traffickers are luring the Irob and other youth of the region to go to Israel and the desperate youth are entering the trap of these criminals. They pay the traffickers everything their family posses to go to the “promised land” and the criminals are selling them to other criminals beyond, mostly to those in the ill-famed Sinai. There they are asked to pay an exorbitant amount and when they fail to

afford it all kinds of abuse befall them, the worst abuse being the sale of their organs without their consent. This is happening in the 21st century under the obvious watch of your government and the International Community. Mr. Prime Minister, we call upon your government to do whatever it can to stop this criminal human trafficking.

Your Excellency, IRAA hopes that the following points would get the highest consideration of your good office.

- 1) **The Abductees Case:** On Feb. 08-2012 during your appearance in the House of Representatives to present the six month performance of your government, for the first time, you were heard talking about the recently kidnapped 100 Ethiopians from North Western Tigray while they were fetching gold. This is something that we happily welcome and we hope your government will do everything at its disposal to get these people released. However, we would like to see the demand pushed further so that it includes all abducted Ethiopian citizens, among them, the more than 100 Irob abductees who were taken from their homes between 1998-2000 by the Eritrean forces. These citizens are abandoned by their government.
Mr. Prime Minister, your government is extremely reluctant when it comes to the abduction of these and other Ethiopian citizens and extremely vocal when citizens of European descents are kidnapped. This is no less than discrimination by any standard. Hence, it is now time for your government to take a bold and unbiased action to get these Irob and other Ethiopian abductees back home to their family and country. We request your government to openly recognize their abduction, and work for their freedom using anything and everything at your capacity.
- 2) **The Border Issue:** According to the EEBC delimitation coordinates, 1/3 of Irob land is ceded to Eritrea. There is no time in history that these areas were under the administration of the political entity now known as Eritrea, be it pre-colonial times, during colonial administration of the entity, or after. These areas being ceded are the most fertile areas of the Irob-land and densely populated. A little less than half of the Irob population resides in these areas. Therefore, as it is pointed out above, the consequence of dividing this minority into two countries is nothing less than deciding on its termination.
Mr. Prime Minister, the Algiers agreement, if it ever had any value, already is revoked by Eritrea in various ways, notably when it ordered the UN peace keeping force to leave the country, making the agreement it entered into regarding the 25km buffer zone de facto void. There is no obligation for Ethiopia to respect the agreement single handedly. Hence, we request you to officially declare the Algiers agreement and the byproduct Hague Decision null and void.
- 3) **Emigration of the Youth:** Criminal human traffickers are busy taking advantage of the jobless Irob and other youth of the region. These youth are the future hopes of our nation. However, poverty and unemployment are forcing them to wander in all directions, leaving behind their family and country in hopes of a better future. This emasculating trend must be tackled and a solution must be found. The government should look for new approaches to mitigate this deplorable unemployment. Our youth needs to be made an asset for the nation. At the same time, the criminal human traffickers must be held accountable for the crimes committed and be put behind bars.

Respectfully submitted,

By: Irob Rights Advocacy Association

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CC The Honorable Mr. Abbadulla Gemmeda

Speaker of the House of Representatives
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

The Honorable Mr. Hailemariam Desalegn
Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

The Honorable Mr. Abbay Woldu
President of Tigray Regional State

The Honorable Mrs. Qudusan Negga
Speaker of the Tigray Regional Parliament

Honorable Mr. Berhe Zigta
Irob representative
House of Peoples Representative
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Mr. Hagos Tsegay
Irob Region Administrator

Medrek

Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP)

All Ethiopian Unity Organization
and
All Ethiopian political and civic organizations wherever they are!

NB: Bellow is the partial list of Irob civilians abducted by Eritrean Armed Forces since 1998.

LIST OF IROB CIVILIANS ABDUCTED BY THE ERITREAN ARMED FORCES SINCE 1998

<u>No.</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age *</u>	<u>No. Fam. *</u>	<u>VILLAGE</u>	<u>KEBELE</u>	<u>Region</u>	<u>YEAR</u>
1	Abdu Woldeyohannes Tesfu	M	59	9	Addaga	Waratle	Irob	1999
2	Abeba Gebregiorgis Kurbia	F			Herra	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
3	Abraha Gebray Kahsay	M		10	Addaga	Waratle	Irob	1999
4	Abraha Gebru Woldu	M			Addaga	Waratle	Irob	1999

5	Abraha Imalmali	M			Dilbi'are	Alitena	Irob	1999
6	Abraha Sebhat Mosa	M	48	6	Ammomaet	Waratle	Irob	1999
7	Abraha Tesfay Gebray	M		3	Dayya	Alitena	Irob	1999
8	Abraha Zigta Tesfay	M	41	6	Gammada	Alitena	Irob	1999
9	Abraham Solomon Gebray	M	50	4	Gabihar	Adgadi-Are	Irob	1998
10	Abrehet WoldeYohannes Imalmali	F			Addaga	Waratle	Irob	2000
11	Adayyu Miratse Fessuh	M	49	7	Mas'hafta	Waratle	Irob	1998
12	Adduma Hagos Tesfu	M			Halal'asa	Ara'e	Irob	1999
13	Ado'ali Sebhat Medhin	M	30	4	Alibadim	Waratle	Irob	1999
14	Adoni Yohannes Gebru	F			Addaga	Waratle	Irob	1999
15	Ado'umar Welde Gebray	M	56	8	Uhudamo	Alitena	Irob	1999
16	Alema Gebray Tesfu	M	49	8	Darro	Waratle	Irob	1999
17	Alema Hailat Lemlem	M	36	3	Sarayt'arah	Waratle	Irob	1999
18	Alema Hailemariam Giday	M	32	1	Katti	Waratle	Irob	1999
19	Alema Tesfay Adagiss	M	49	9	Awo	Alitena	Irob	1998
20	Alema Tesfay Kahsay	M	32	4	Dayya	Alitena	Irob	1999
21	Alema Tessema Gebray	M	45	8	Abe	Waratle	Irob	1999
22	Assefa Hagos	M		8	Maichia	Adigadi-Are	Irob	2000
23	Asfaha Giday Tesfay	M			Argullo	Alitena	Irob	1999
24	Atakilti Beyene Woldu	M			Wankabo	Waratle	Irob	1999
25	Berhane Medhin Hagos	M			Sabatit	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
26	Berhe Tesfay Woldu	M	45	5	Darro	Waratle	Irob	1999

27	Berhe WoldeGabriel Beyene	M			Agarale	Agaralecoma	Irob	1998
28	Birhane GebreMichael Hadgu	M			Haidille	Adgadi-Are	Irob	1998
29	Birhane Kidane Tesfay	M			Aburta	Adigadi_Are	Irob	2000
30	Birhanu Tsairu Hagos	F		6	Addaga	Waratle	Irob	1999
31	Biserat Hagos Kahsay	M		8	Haidille	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1998
32	Burur Hagos Gebru	F			Halal'asa	Ara'e	Irob	1999
33	Dehab Hagos Hawku	F		3	Saratta	Waratle	Irob	1999

34	Desta Gu'ulay Hagos	M	40	3	Garassa	Weratle	Irob	1999
35	Desta Tesfay Mosa	M	42	5	Amomaet	Waratle	Irob	1999
36	Desta WoldeGirogis Hailu	M			Ara'ecoma	Ara'e	Irob	1999
37	Fana Abraha Gebru	F			Addaga	Waratle	Irob	1999
38	Fessehaye Missgina Tesfay	M			Aburta	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
39	Fessuh Tsadwa Hagos	M		8	Haidille	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
40	Fessuh Welde Sebhat	M	42	3	Dola	Waratle	Irob	1999
41	Fessuh Wolde WoldeSelassie	M			Garassa	Waratle	Irob	1999
42	Freweini Woldu Hagos	F			Saratta	Waratle	Irob	2000
43	Geray Abraha Gebray Ebratu	M			Wankabo	Waratle	Irob	08/02
44	GebreGiorgis Kahsay FesehaTsion	M			Hido	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1998
45	Gebremeskel GebreEgziabher	M			Enguraile	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1998
46	GebreYohannes Hagos WoldeGiorgis	M		8	Haidille	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
47	GebreYohannes Mehari Danne	M		1	Addaga	Waratle	Irob	1999

48	Ghiday Hagos Sebhat	M		8	Mad'aa	Sebeya	G-Mekeda	1998
49	Girmay Teka	M			Maichia	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1998
50	Girmay Tesfay	M		12	Aburta	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
51	Girmay WoldeMichael Tesfat	M	36	8	Amomaet	Waratle	Irob	1999
52	Hagos Amru Kahsay	M		1	Addaga	Waratle	Irob	1999
53	Hagos Hailu GebreSelassie	M			Maichia	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
54	Hagosa Hagos Kama	F			Wankabo	Waratle	Irob	1999
55	Haile Berhe Woldu	M			Weratle	Waratle	Irob	1999
56	Haile Hagos Kahsay	M			Awda	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
57	Haileselassie Giday Desta	M	38	3	Darro	Waratle	Irob	1999
58	Hailu Berhe Woldu	M	38	7	Addaga	Waratle	Irob	1999
59	Halibo Kahsay Hagos	M		5	Darro	Waratle	Irob	1999
60	Kahsay Hagos Tesfu	M			Ara'ecoma	Ara'e	Irob	1998
61	Kahsay Mehari Hadgu	M		4	Haidille	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
62	Kahsay Miratse Fessuh	M	46	5	Mas'hafta	Waratle	Irob	1999
63	Kahsay WoldeMichael Debessay	M	48	7	Amomaet	Waratle	Irob	1999
64	Keshi Adduma GebreMedhin, Rev.	M		8	Enguraile	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1998
65	Keshi Girmay Fitiwi Tesfu, Rev.	M			Unguraile	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
66	Keshi Hadgu Gebray, Rev.	M	65	11	Maichia	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1998
67	Kidane Halibo Hagos Ebratu	M			Wankabo	Waratle	Irob	08/02
68	Mahari HaileSelassie Giday	M			Agarale	Agaralecoma	Irob	1999

69	Mahari Hagos Tesfu	M			Halal'asa	Ara'e	Irob	1999
70	Maisiso Gebru Robli	M	49	7	Gibidawo	Alitena	Irob	1998
71	Mebrahtom Woldegabriel Beyene	M			Agarale	Agaralecoma	Irob	1998
72	Medhin Fessuh Debessay	M	59	8	Amomaet	Waratle	Irob	1999
73	Melles Woldeyohannes Kahsay	M	45	5	Kafna	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1998
74	Mesgena Yohannes Hagos	M			Assefat	Agaralecoma	Irob	1998
75	Mihret Berhe WoldeSelassie	F			Aburta	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
76	Misgina GebreGiorgis Kurbia	M			Herra	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
77	Negusse Tesfay Woldu	M	38	1	Darro	Waratle	Irob	1999
78	Seyoum Woldu Tesfay	M			Aburta	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
79	Teame Gebray Hagos	M		10	Haidille	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
80	Teame Kidane Tsadwa	M		4	Sabatit	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
81	Tesfay Gebray Hagos	M	50	6	Weratle	Waratle	Irob	1999
82	Tesfay Hagos Kahsay	M		7	Hahayti	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
83	Tesfay Kahsay Tesfu	M	42	5	Addaga	Waratle	Irob	1999
84	Tesfay Negusse Lemlem	M			Gibidawo	Alitena	Irob	1999
85	Tesfay WoldeGirogis Beyene	M	30		Aburta	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
86	Tesfay Yohannes Hagos	M			Sab'ata	Ara'e	Irob	1998
87	Teum Funa Hailat	M	20		Aradahe	Waratle	Irob	1999
88	Tsega Abraham Tesfay	F			Haidille	Waratle	Irob	1999
89	Tsegay Miratse Fessuh	M	55	20	Mas'hafta	Waratle	Irob	1998
90	WoldeGiorgis Beyene Suba	M	64	7	Aburta	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999

91	WoldeGiorgis Kahsay Tesfu	M	39	5	Addaga	Waratle	Irob	1999
92	Welde Sebhat Mosa	M	64	10	Dola	Waratle	Irob	1999
93	Yohannes GebreSelassie	M			Maichia	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1998
94	Yohannes Hagos Kahsay	M	50	9	Amuidaga	Waratle	Irob	1998
95	Yohannes Mahari Hagos	M		5	Haidille	Adigadi-Are	Irob	1999
96	Yohannes Tesfay Woldu	M	32	1	Adocomo	Waratle	Irob	1999