

His Excellency Jose Manuel Durao Barroso
President of the European Commission
European Commission
B-1049 Brussels

March 10, 2009
EGS/S031009

Dear President,

We write this letter with the hope that our immediate and long range concerns with the overall relationship of the EU and the present Eritrean government and the pending \$160 million US dollar Development Aid EU is planning to forward to the Eritrean government will create an opportunity for us to directly communicate with your office. In a modest way we also hope to convey the concerns of our silenced people to your office and add another dimension to the growing critical discussion on this matter.

We will like you to know that our organization has no principle based objections to EU's desire to participate and contribute to the development of Eritrea. We appreciate and admire the overall commitment of EU to find ways to extend a helping hand to the people of Eritrea in their dogged effort to make a meaningful economic progress in the face of overwhelming challenges and constraints imposed on them by the government. We hope this desire will not ebb in coming days and years.

As it stands now EU's involvement in Eritrea is focused strictly on reconstruction: short- term stabilization program dealing with four areas.

1. Post –conflict rehabilitation
2. Demobilization
3. Road maintenance
4. Food security.

Without venturing into other fundamental issues even on these 4 areas the result has been at best look warm. With the exception of, maybe, road building, the overall trend has been an increase in internal and external conflict, massive militarization and mobilization of all potential work force into the army and the expanding food shortage that has now turned into a full blown famine- all of it due to the erroneous agro-economic policies of the Eritrean government both at the macro and micro level.

We believe EU, with all its information sources, is well aware of the Eritrean government's stark failure and how this failure has put the people of Eritrea between a rock and a hard place. Without any democratic space to register their objection, protest or opposition to the government's policy the failure has been compounded and magnified. Eritrea's economic meltdown is a direct result of the suffocating monopolization of all business and economic

activities by the ruling party- PFDJ (the government). This underlining cause deserves serious consideration and evaluation in the design and delivery of any well-meaning foreign aid package.

Without any transparent statement coming out of EU concerning its evaluation and justification for proposing \$160 million US dollar worth of financial aid to one of Africa's most unaccountable and secretive governments, our concern, we believe, is not only well-founded but legitimate enough to be raised publicly so that not only the leadership of EU Commission but the people of Europe and Eritrea will hear our concern and take part in the urgently needed conversation.

Excellency,

Based on the standards set by the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights adopted in December 2000 by the Presidents of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission in Nice and then amended by the Lisbon Treaty in December 2007 elevating the 2000 Charter to a Treaty we expect better consideration towards the people of Eritrea. This historic document affirms Dignity (chapter 1), Freedom-all basic freedoms (chapter 2) Equality- equality before the law (chapter 3) Solidarity –workers right (chapter 4) Citizens' rights –the right political rights to vote et (chapter 5) and Justice -the right to fair trial etc (chapter 6) – These lofty idea at the present stage of human history are not the exclusive properties of the people of Europe. The Charter only affirms the universality of these values. These are the same values highly treasured by the people of Eritrea.

We expect EU to stand by its' publicly proclaimed charters and treaties in its relation with "third countries". On the basis of EU's December 13, 2001 Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues - this guideline is supposedly to permeate all aspects of its external relationship. Our need to reiterate this fundamental principle emanates from the fact based by all the human rights' instruments, guidelines and charters periodically proclaimed by EU Commission and its various departments if there is one government in Africa that does not deserve a positive evaluation it is the present government in Eritrea.

Excellency,

We will not waste your time detailing the egregious abuse of basic human rights in Eritrea that has been going on for an extended period. Nor will we question EU's motive in its honest desire to contribute to Eritrea's economic development. But we are obligated by a sense of duty, national responsibility and basic human decency to question the wisdom of extending this amount of aid without publically uttering any meaningful protest about the wholesale failure of the Eritrean government to respect not even one of the basic human rights listed on EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights and the EU's Guideline on Human Rights Dialogue.

If there has been an ongoing dialogue between the Eritrean government and EU's Working Group on Human Rights the people of Eritrea as well as Eritrean Human Right activists, all over the world, are not aware of it. In the absence of transparency it is natural for Eritreans and those concerned about Eritrea to feel that EU's ability to extend Economic Aid to a repressive government without any articulated benchmarks or requirements is tantamount to tacitly endorsing the government's misguided economic, social and political policies.

In our modest opinion the question previously raised by her Excellency Glenys Kinnock , the Welsh member of EU correctly summarizes and conveys the essence of our concern:
“Nobody has ever argued that it isn’t necessary for us to provide humanitarian aid and support for education and healthcare but, clearly there are huge difficulties in monitoring and controlling what the Commission is doing .There are no NGO’s in Eritrea. So who is distributing the aid? Who is ensuring that it doesn’t go to the wrong hands?”

In EU’s own words as stated in the document signed both by EU and Eritrean representative on November 12, 2002 known as the “Eritrea-European Community –Country Strategy Paper and National Indicative Programme for the period 2002-2007 “page 15 section 5.3 states:

“The Cotonou Agreement makes explicitly reference to the principle to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. Special attention has to be paid to Governance in order to ensure coherence in the analysis and the orientations of the response as well as complementarities and synergy with the other short-term interventions. The scope of EC interventions to strengthen good governance will very much depend on the outcome of the political dialogue as mentioned in point 5, where the partners will also agree on pace, measures and indicators for their cooperation. Interventions will aim at strengthening democratisation, for example by supporting a genuine electoral process and the subsequent setting-up of democratic institutions. Eritrea is also a focus country for the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights. Concerning the management of public affairs, the EC should be ready to assist capacity building initiatives launched by the Government in close co-operation with other donors which have a lengthy experience in this field (in particular, the BWI and the PNUD). Support to the enforcement of the decentralization process and to the establishment of a legal framework enabling the right environment for the use of rights (fundamental rights, justice, business and trade) is also important for a country that bases its development on the private sector initiative.”

What good governance has mushroomed in Eritrea since the signing of the Country Strategy to justify this ongoing trust? None whatsoever from where we stand and observe.

Section 9 of the 2002 European parliament Resolution on Eritrea states:

“Calls on the Council and the Member States to take a coordinated stance with regard to relations with Eritrea, to monitor closely the political situation in the country and to make the continuation of EU achieved in the areas of human rights and democratization, in particular freedom of speech, press and assembly, and the holding of democratic elections;”

What follow up has unearthed a promising movement towards democratization in Eritrea since this resolution? More jails and more refugees have become the identifying characteristics of the Eritrean government.

EU’s Mid Term Review for 2004 does not even address any aspect of the Country Strategy Paper concerns raised in section 5.3 None of the issues dealing with Human Rights and Democratization raised by the EU parliaments resolution are even scratched? Why such a gross oversight? Yet EU is getting ready to supply the most irresponsible government in Africa with \$160 million US dollar without demanding any positive move towards respecting the basic rights of its people.

This move defies reason and common sense at the same time.

We find this not only puzzling but have to categorize it as a sign of unintended disrespect for the people of Eritrea. This kind of activity amounts to extending unconditional support to the oppressive regime in Asmara without even adopting another Parliamentary resolution to modestly censor the government for failing to move one inch forward towards democratic governance or any sense of basic decency. It is unbalanced and it is unfair in its treatment of the Eritrean people.

What safety net has the EU established at this time to monitor the correct deployment of the intended Aid? How long does the EU intend to follow this one - sided relationship at the cost of the people of Eritrea? At what point in time will the reassessment and repositioning start? We eagerly wait to engage the relevant EU department in conjunction with other Eritrean Human Rights organization to address these critical issues in a structured and sustained manner. If EU needs to reassure the people of Eritrea, mitigate their genuine concerns and in the process garner more evidence about the true nature of the Eritrean government it will be very productive if it were to undertake the following three actions:

- Make a public statement about the benchmarks the Eritrean government must meet – with a clearly defined time framework- in order to access the fund and explicitly state what the consequence of failure to leave up to the bench mark will mean
- Since Europe is teeming with thousands of Eritrean refugees who were forced to abandon their country due to the repressive government's unending brutality EU will have an opportunity to hold an open hearing and gather detail information about the depth of the Eritrean national crisis and openly welcome Eritreans fleeing persecution by the Eritrean Government with positive resettlement policy.
- Allow EU's Working Group on Human Rights to meet with the mushrooming Eritrean civic society from Europe, USA, Australia and Africa etc lay the foundation for a constructive dialogue.

Excellency,

We appreciate EU's positive intentions towards Eritrea. Our concern is based on the fact that the Eritrean government has no sense of accountability either to its people or to the treaties and contractual obligations it is signatory to. It is neither contained by rule of law, cultural restraints or basic morality. It is a lawless government. Trusting this kind of government is a difficult undertaking. Even though not publicly articulated we are convinced that most of EU's member nation states share our conclusion based on their direct experience.

We hope EU collectively will reach the same conclusion and find definitive ways to not only show its concern for Economic Development but also for the fundamental rights of the Eritrean people by clearly and unequivocally stating its support publically at this critical time in their struggle to be treated with respect, dignity and live under a government constrained and guided by a democratic constitution.

Sincerely,

Seyoum Tesfaye

**Chairman of Eritrean Global Solidarity for Justice- Human Rights -
Democracy president@eritreanglobalsolidarity.org**

Eritrean Global Solidarity Member Organizations

1. Awate Foundation
2. Citizens for Democratic Rights in Eritrea
3. Citizens United for Human Rights in Eritrea- San Diego
4. Delina Foundation
5. Eritrean Public Forum – Minnesota
6. Eritrean Youth Renaissance
7. Eritrean American Public Forum of Greater New York
8. Eritrean-American Public Forum of Dallas and Fort-Worth
9. Eritrean Community for Human Rights and Refugee Protection
10. Eritrean Democratic Public Forum-Boston
11. Eritrean Solidarity for Justice and Human Rights-Atlanta