



Permanent Mission of The State of Eritrea
To the United Nations, New York

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Girma Asmerom
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**On agenda item 68 (b,c): Promotion and Protection of
Human Rights during the Interactive Dialogue of the Special
Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea**

Ms. Sheila B. Keetharuth

**At the Third Committee of the 69th Session of the
United Nations General Assembly**

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Madam Chairperson,

Even though, as the accused party, Eritrea has the right to demand equal time in order to rebut and respond to the politically motivated report presented today which is full of fabricated allegations and hearsays, I am not going to bore this Committee by doing so, since the Government of Eritrea, on several occasions, has given a clear response to the Special Rapporteur's report. However, I would appeal for all delegates to read my full statement which is already circulated.

Madam Chairperson,

Today, I will simply concentrate on elaborating to the members of this august Committee on:

- **The reliability and credibility of the Special Rapporteur and her report**
- **Where Eritrea came from, where Eritrea is today and where it is going**
- **The establishment of the Commission of Inquiry**
- **The way forward and conclusions**

Madam Chairperson

On the Reliability and Credibility of the Report and the Rapporteur

Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 stresses for mandate holders, among others, to display independence, impartiality and objectivity in their work. After listening carefully to the report, I can say with confidence that the Special Rapporteur, other than making sweeping statements such as, "**extrajudicial killing, torture, slave labor, indefinite national service**", has not presented any evidence to back up her allegations. In fact, she has unfortunately taken it upon herself to preside as **the Accuser, Prosecutor, Witness and the Judge**.

The common expression, "**don't shoot the messenger**" is often adequate and reasonable advise. However, when the messenger oversteps his/her mandate by acting as "**Accuser, Prosecutor, Witness, and Judge**", it is legally and procedurally correct to question the credibility, objectivity and impartiality of the messenger. It is also procedurally and legally justifiable to question the credibility and impartiality of **a witness, prosecutor, and judge**. Eritrea, therefore, has the right to question the credibility, objectivity and the impartiality of the Special Rapporteur and by deduction to question the validity and admissibility of her report. It must also be underlined that in addition to the tainted, subjective and unsubstantiated nature of the report concerning human rights issue in Eritrea; the Special Rapporteur has, for the last two years, been publicly demonizing and discrediting the Eritrean Government via various media outlets. In these interviews, she has openly expressed her negative and biased opinion regarding Eritrea and its government. The Rapporteur has essentially become an activist and a tacit advocate for certain countries, groups and individuals who are diligently working for regime change in Eritrea.

More specifically, when analyzing what has been written concerning Eritrea's national service program-which is similar to that of many countries- the Special Rapporteur has misrepresented it

as an "**indefinite forced conscription and slave labor program**". She has even urged the Government of Eritrea to **suspend the National Service Program**. This call comes at a time when sovereign Eritrean territory is under foreign occupation and the Eritrean people are being burdened by unjust sanctions. What she called "slave labor", is actually a national mobilization effort to promote grass root participation from the people of Eritrea; sectors of focus include afforestation, dam and road construction, soil and water conservation and other programs that will advance the transformation of the country. This grass root approach and participation should be commended rather than condemned and misrepresented as "**slave labor**".

For the reasons elaborated above, Eritrea strongly feels the report presented today should be rejected and the mandate of the Special Rapporteur be terminated. I want this august body to understand that this is not an attack on the Special Rapporteur. Eritrea is simply requesting that the principles of impartiality and objectivity of the mandate holder, as well as the rules and procedures of the Human Rights Council, be respected.

Madam Chairperson,

The report does not reflect the reality in Eritrea. It is a report compiled using a cut and paste method from Annual Human Rights Reports from certain countries, hostile websites, and social media outlets; this includes some disgruntled Eritreans with an ax to grind against the Government of Eritrea. It is true Eritrean refugees located in different continents are also referred in the report as "**credible source of information**". What does one expect from refugees whose main motive is to be resettled in America, Europe, Canada or Australia and who are desperate to be given refugee status by these countries. If these refugees don't demonize and accuse the government of Eritrea, they will be compromising their interests of being resettled or granted refugee status. It must be also underlined that massive illegal migration to the western world from poor and developing countries, in search of a better income is not solely an Eritrean trend, but a global phenomena.

Madam Chairperson,

The motive and objective of this report is nothing else but regime change. The modus operandi is extraordinarily transparent. First fabricate an allegation, and then generate an aura of perception; once this has occurred, perception becomes recognized as reality. Finally, all necessary means and resources are deployed to overthrow the targeted government. This modus operandi and misguided policy pursued by certain individuals, groups or countries will serve neither the interest of the countries of the region nor the countries who are behind the agenda of regime change in Eritrea. This misguided policy would only create disaster and crisis in the Horn of Africa. It has to be revisited, revised and corrected. Eritrea, which is the most stable country in the volatile region of the Horn of Africa, calls on all partners for mutual respect. This partnership must be based on understating and cooperation. Eritrea and its government have been targeted for no reason, other than for thinking **Outside of the Box and the strategic location of the country**.

- Concerning regional and international issues, the Eritrean Government pursues an independent foreign policy.
- Concerning Economic Transformation, Eritrea pursues policies and procedures that are grounded in principles of self reliance and internally driven motivating factors. **Foreign aid must be considered as enabler or a catalyst, not an end.**
- Concerning Strategic Location, Eritrea is located in the Red Sea region with 1,200 kilometers of coast line. It must be understood, that the Red Sea is an international trade route for oil and other essential commodities and goods. It is a trade route that connects the Suez Canal in the north and Bab-el-Mandeb in the South. These are two areas which military strategists call choke points. All major powers would like to have a foothold in this region by "**Any Means Necessary**". They cannot and will not tolerate a regime that does not dance to their tune or take instructions from them. The resisting country or government will be inevitably targeted and labeled as "**spoiler**".

Madam Chairperson

where Eritrea came from, where it is today and where it is going

For the past two decades the country has been engaged in healing the wounds of war, ensuring peace and security, accelerating the development agenda and preserving the dignity of its people. It is important to recognize that my government's efforts to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms are impeded by the occupation of sovereign Eritrean territory and unjust sanctions imposed on the people.

Any report that does not appreciate or recognize the circumstances in Eritrea, is minimizing the impact that the Occupations and Sanctions have on the welfare of the people of Eritrea, and should not be considered a serious report whose aim is to promote the human rights interest of the people. The resistance by some quarters to lift the unjust sanctions and the reluctance to bring an end to the occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories should be considered as a **collective punishment which is the highest form of human rights violations**. It is crystal clear that the sanctions negatively and directly affect the vulnerable members of society, in particular women and children. Therefore, governments or organizations who preach about human rights issues must first and foremost practice what they preach. They should unequivocally call for the unconditional and immediate lifting of the sanctions against the Eritrean people and respect for the sovereignty of Eritrea.

Madam Chairperson,

I am not presenting excuses or justifications for some of the human rights problems Eritrea is facing today. I am simply contextualizing the realities in Eritrea so that the Committee can understand the situation. The realities of the situation are vital to proper analysis of the difficulties Eritrea is faced with, and they should not be denied or avoided. There is no nation or state that does not suffer from the presence of human rights issues. However, when we debate and explain human rights issues, it is essential that those analyzing the issues discuss the development stage and transformation process that each country or nation has undergone. The right to development is a fundamental right and the eradication of poverty is a human rights issue that should be taken seriously and tackled collectively.

In this context, the **Permanent Representative of Malawi to the United Nations**, on behalf of the **African Group**, on 22 October 2014 during the Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights said: **“The African group would like to reaffirm that interdependence between development and respect for human rights is internationally recognized. Human rights cannot be guaranteed in an environment of poverty. The recognition of the interdependence of economic, social, and cultural rights with political and civil rights is an important prerequisite for national, regional, and international development.”**

Madam Chairperson,

The right to development is a fundamental, universal, and inalienable right of all people, in particular the LDC's, which Eritrea is a member of.

No country or government can claim to have fulfilled all its human rights obligations. Eritrea acknowledges, like all countries should, that it faces human rights challenges which the government and the people are constantly and diligently working to address. In the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, Eritrea takes its obligations seriously. Eritrea firmly believes constructive engagement will manifest meaningful contributions towards the enjoyment of everyone's full rights. In this spirit, Eritrea is taking serious steps to address human rights.

On Strengthening Good Governance, Eritrea has:

- built a grass root participatory political system based on the full and responsible engagement of its people, at home and abroad.
- started the process of transforming transitional laws into national laws by expanding its judiciary services and establishing community magistrates.
- announced its readiness to draft a new constitution.
- presented its national report last February during the second cycle of the UPR process and accepted roughly 100 recommendations, covering a wide spectrum of Economic, Social, Cultural, Political and Civic rights;
- discussed the outcome of the UPR process with all relevant bodies of the Eritrean government and civil societies; and in a separate forum, gave the same briefing to the diplomatic missions in Eritrea;
- requested the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki moon, to extend his cooperation in the implementation of the UPR recommendations that Eritrea accepted;
- held bilateral meetings, on numerous occasions, with the High Commissioner for Human Rights and its representatives in Geneva and New York; invited human rights officers from

the Office of High Commissioner for the Human Rights (OHCHR) for a work visit to Eritrea, last January;

- made specific calls, and last September, for the OHCHR to extend its cooperation in strengthening the judicial system and in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable groups of the society, particularly disabled persons;
- engaged with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' rights, and conducted regular political dialogue with the EU resident representative and Missions on the basis of the Cotonou Agreement;
- submitted national reports on Eritrea to the Committee on the Rights of the Child; and also to the Committee on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which is scheduled for consideration by the relevant UN treaty body in February 2015.
- acceded last September, to the Convention Against Torture and Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocol on suppressing trafficking in persons;

On Empowering Women:

- Women's equality to men is guaranteed by law without any discrimination or limitation.
- Women have the right to equal pay for equal work and they have the right to own property, including land.
- In the National Assembly, 30% of the seats are allocated for women.
- In all community courts, one of the three judicial appointments must be reserved for women.
- The National Gender Action Plan (2014-2019) which focuses on education, health, economic empowerment and power sharing and decision making processes is being reviewed.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has been translated into local languages and widely disseminated, particularly among women. It is implemented in line with the Global Program of Action.
- Eritrea's National report on CEDAW will be considered by the Committee, in Geneva next February.
- Eritrea is among the first countries who has submitted its National Report on the Beijing Platform of Action to the AU and UN Women.
- spearheaded by the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) with full participation of community and religious leaders, and coordinated media and grass root campaigns on all types of violence, including domestic violence is criminalized.
- Harmful traditional practices such as FGM and early marriages are punishable by law.
- National Union of Eritrean Women is a grass root organization which was established in 1979, held recently its 7th national congress from 15 to 17 September 2014 and elected its new members of the Executive Committee, which include a significant number of youth.

On Social and Economic Rights

- Basic Social Services are delivered and extended to all parts of the country, including remote areas.
- Under the theme, "**Education for All**", the Eritrean government is providing free education and opportunities at Kindergarten, Elementary, Secondary, Technical, Vocational, and Tertiary levels. Adult literacy is extensively implemented. About 947 literacy centers, with the help of 2023 facilitators have been set up. In this program, women constitute 95% of the participants.
- Eritrea has achieved **the Health MDGs, 4, 5 and 6** and is also on track to 2, 3 and 7.
- Under 5 Mortality Rate has been reduced by Two Thirds, and Maternal Mortality rate has been reduced by 75%. Malaria Morbidity and Mortality have been reduced by 85% and 90% respectively. HIV/AIDs prevalence which is 0.93%, the lowest in Africa. Today according to WHO Report, Eritrea is declared Polio and Measles Free Country and Vaccination of children has reached almost 100%.

On the Right of the Child

- Eritrea fully supports and diligently implements (even during the struggle for independence) the campaign, "**Children Not Soldiers**" that was launched in March, by the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict and the UNICEF .
- In partnership with UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA and UNDP Eritrea is implementing the Country Program Action Plan (CPAP).
- Street Children are given care and necessary assistance.
- Vulnerable Orphans are integrated with their Extended Family or in Group Homes with the hope of eliminating the permanent orphanage institutions.
- UNICEF, has a solid partner program with Eritrea concerning children. About 20 Adolescent/Child friendly spaces (ACFS) are established in schools, health facilities and communities that are highly impacted by landmines.

Combating Human Trafficking

- Eritrea is not spared from the heinous crime as several of its nationals, especially its youth, have been victimized at the hands of international human traffickers.
- Eritrea has signed the protocol against trafficking in persons.
- It has forged cooperation with neighboring states and regional bodies and other concerned countries.
- It has frequently participated in Ministerial Meetings and Workshops.

- It participated in the regional ministerial conference that was convened in Khartoum from 13 to 16 October. The meeting was organized by the AU, Sudan, UNHCR and IOM.
- It has signed bilateral and multilateral agreements to combat human trafficking and illegal migration.
- It has intensified preventive awareness campaigns through mass media, and grass root organizations and community based public meetings.
- It has introduced an anti money laundering proclamation.
- In order to fight all kinds of extremism and terrorism, as well as transnational organized crime, it has cosponsored several United Nations General Assembly resolutions.

Madam Chairperson,

On the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry

The recent establishment of the three person Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea is a politically motivated act that is a waste of time and energy. It is redundant and unjust. Human rights ideals cannot be promoted by naming and shaming, finger pointing and confrontation. It is to correct the politicization of human rights issue that the Human Rights Commission was discredited and dissolved in 2006 and that the Human Rights Council is created. In our humble opinion, we are allowing history to repeat itself. Let's not defeat the objectives of human right issues by politicizing them. That is why the resolution adopted on the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry did not enjoy unanimity as claimed by some quarters. For the record there are countries that have clearly disassociated themselves from the resolution. This was also not a resolution that was tabled by the African Group in Geneva.

Moreover, what is the logic of creating or establishing the Commission of Inquiry while maintaining the Special Rapporteur that was established two years ago. It is an expensive exercise that requires a significant amount of resources. It is misappropriation of funds. The Combined Budget requested for the two bodies is more than Eight Million Dollars. This money could be used for building two or three Health and Education centers, in Eritrea or any other developing country.

It is unfortunate this valuable and exorbitant amount of resources are being squandered to cover Hotel, Air and other expenses for the members of the group- just to compile hundreds of cut and paste unsubstantiated allegations against a member state, in this case Eritrea.

The puzzle regarding this unjust action is that the current Special Rapporteur for Eritrea will be wearing two hats; one as the Special Rapporteur and the other one as member of the Commission of Inquiry. As a result, next year the HRC will be obliged and required to hear two reports on the same issue and subject that is compiled and written with the full participation of the same person that is wearing those two hats. It is obvious to anybody that it is not possible for her to write and prepare two reports that will contradict each other. That is why Eritrea is saying that the Special Rapporteur and the Commission of Inquiry are redundant and a waste of resources. They should be dissolved.

On the Way Forward and Conclusion

In conclusion, constructive dialogue and cooperation through the UPR mechanism is the way forward. Intimidation, threat or preconditions have not worked in the past and will not work in the future. Naming and shaming and country specific mandates must stop. Double standards must be rejected. Engagement and dialogue must be encouraged. Resources squandered for the activities and establishment of the Special Rapporteurs and Commission of Inquiries can be allocated to the OHRCH-the body that is mandated to assist member states in their efforts of expanding and developing their human rights regimes and institutions. Holding debates and making recommendations on the destiny and future of the 3.5 million people, in this case Eritrea, on the basis of one or three individuals findings and politically motivated subjective opinion is unacceptable. Once again Eritrea appeals to reject and dismiss the report and to dissolve the Special Rapporteur and the Commission of Inquiry.

Madam Chairperson,

The Eritrean people know their rights and obligations. They understand what is good and bad, as well as what is right or wrong for them. What they need is understanding and solidarity, not threat and intimidation. They do not need advisers that tell them what to do and how to run their country. For those countries, regional and international organizations, and institutions-as well as concerned individuals and groups-who do understand the situation in Eritrea and express their solidarity, and are ready to work with the Government; I can only say thank you and rest assured that the people of Eritrea and the Government will not fail you on human right issues and other important social, political and development matters.

Thank you