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CECCO

Coalition des communautés et organisations érythréennes du Canada
Coalition of Eritrean Canadian Communities and Organizations

May 27, 2014

Ms. Jennifer McGuire
General Manager and Editor in Chief
CBC News and Centres
205 Wellington Street West
Toronto ON M5V 3G7

LETTER TO THE CBC FROM THE CECCO

Dear Ms. McGuire,

On May 24, 2014, CBC News published an article online titled “Despite sanctions, Deputy Mayor celebrates conflict-prone state of Eritrea” that was neither balanced nor accurate.¹ The article was in relation to a letter sent by Deputy Mayor Norm Kelly acknowledging the achievements of Eritrea’s people on the eve of its annual Independence Day celebrations. The article unnecessarily creates controversy around Mr. Kelly’s protocol letter through its seemingly innocuous negative portrayal of Eritrean-Canadian relations, and leaves very little doubt about the accuracy of the facts used to support it.

Your story relies on facts that bear significantly on its honesty and balanced representation of Canada’s relationship with Eritrea. We wish to bring the following facts and corrections to your attention in the hopes you will balance your story by letting readers know about these developments:

1. The article states in its opening paragraph that, “The Canadian ambassador to Eritrea is not even in Eritrea, but a diplomatic outpost in Khartoum, Sudan.” The CBC did not deem it relevant to mention that Canada has never had an embassy or an ambassador located in Eritrea since the latter gained independence. This fact is important because the reader would otherwise infer that the lack of Canadian diplomatic representation in Eritrea today is a result of poor relations and not done to save on administrative costs. Also, the CBC did not deem it relevant to mention that Canada has a long standing Consulate in Asmara with Canadian staff, located at 745 Abeneh Street.²
2. The article cites a speech made on May 18th 2014 by Ahmed Iman who is falsely identified as “the head of consular affairs at the Eritrean embassy in Canada”. This is inaccurate because there is no Eritrean embassy in Canada. This is confirmed on the Government of Canada’s website which states that Eritrea only has a consulate in Toronto.³ Based on the close wording in your article, we think your staff writer likely lifted this

¹ *Despite sanctions, Deputy Mayor celebrates conflict-prone state of Eritrea*, May 24 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/international/toronto/1.2652565>

² http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/sudan_south_sudan-soudan_soudan_du_sud/eritrea-erythree.aspx?lang=eng

error from a secondary source article originating on www.shabait.com.⁴ Furthermore, the CBC article falsely quotes Mr. Iman, who at no material time stated in his speech that ‘criticisms against his government were external conspiracies.’ It is likely that your staff writer did not attend the May 18 event but instead relied on the aforementioned article from Shabait and took the journalistic liberty in attributing some of the themes from the article as actual quotes from a speech. What is said in the secondary source article is the following, “Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Ahmed Iman, Head of Consular Affairs in the Eritrean Embassy in Canada, congratulated the Eritrean people and their leadership, and expressed appreciation for those who made remarkable input in organizing the ceremony.”⁵ The quote reported on CBC News states the following, “Ahmed Iman, head of consular affairs in the Eritrean embassy in Canada, made an Independence Day speech on May 18, in which he referred to criticisms of his government as “external conspiracies.” The quote cited by the CBC does not appear in the Shabait article nor were we able to locate it through any other reputable media publication. In keeping with the values of accuracy, integrity and fairness, we request that CBC News correct these errors and provide us with an explanation for the foregoing.

3. While relations have become strained between Canada and Eritrea, the CBC did not deem it relevant to mention that bilateral trade between Canada and Eritrea has increased. According to the government of Canada, two way merchandise trade between the countries increased from \$2.92 million in 2010 to \$325.8 million in 2011.⁶
4. Moreover the article states that Eritrea has similarly limited relationships with other countries but the CBC did not deem it relevant to mention that congratulation messages similar to the one written by Mr. Kelly’s office were equally sent from numerous world leaders including Shimon Peres of Israel, Pope Francis of the Vatican, Ban Ki Moon of the United Nations, Lady Catherine Ashton from the EU, African Union leaders and many others. We might also add that several mayors from major U.S. cities have conveyed similar messages to the Eritrean people. None of the foregoing letters have been labelled as controversial by any reputable media outlets in North America or Europe.
5. In the article it is also written that, “Eritrea is one of the poorest nations in Africa, yet Canada does not provide humanitarian aid to it.” The CBC did not deem it relevant to mention that Eritrea has a unique policy around foreign aid - it has maintained a cautionary approach to aid since its independence due to risk of creating a culture of dependency that today plagues other countries in the region. It has opted rather to pursue a self-reliance policy with occasional partnerships with some donor countries. This fact is important to mention otherwise the reader may infer that Canada refuses to provide humanitarian aid to Eritrea because of political differences between the two countries. Moreover, the Canadian government admits that it provides regional funding to multilateral partners, which may provide benefits to Eritrea. (see footnote 3)
6. The article states that, “Canadians are urged not to go to Eritrea”. When we contacted the Eritrean consulate in Toronto we were informed that the number of Canadians returning to Eritrea, based on the number of issued visas, has increased in the last five years. The CBC did not deem it relevant to inquire about this fact. I might add that, a day after the publication of this article, The Eritrean consulate also confirmed to us they were not contacted by the CBC for comments. The CECCO and the 30.000 Canadians of Eritrean origin are determined to create a more fertile ground for the betterment of relations between Canada and Eritrea. We are proud of both our Eritrean and Canadian Heritage and will continue to promote travelling to Eritrea.
7. Lastly, the article provides a partial and imbalanced chronology of important events in Eritrean history since its independence. It begins by stating that, “Eritrea has a violent recent history with its neighbouring countries,

⁴ <http://shabait.com/news/local-news/17097-eritrean-community-members-in-canada-reiterate-readiness-to-mount-staunch-resistance-against-external-conspiracies->

⁵ Ibid at paragraph 2

⁶ Canada-Eritrea Relations Fact Sheet, http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/sudan_south_sudan-soudan_soudan_du_sud/eritrean-erythree.aspx?lang=eng

with battles against Yemen and Ethiopia.” However, even according to the International Crisis Group, a commonly cited think tank funded by the Canadian government and headed by former Canadian Supreme Court judge Louise Arbour, the international community erred seriously after the Eritrea-Ethiopia war of 1998 in not putting greater pressure on Ethiopia to implement the legally sanctioned international Boundary Commission’s finding that granted disputed land to Eritrea.⁷ This fact is important because Eritrea’s foreign policy is largely affected by the resulting perception that Canada and its international partners are behind Ethiopia, no matter what it does. It should be noted that like Mr. Kelly’s letter to the consulate, Ms. Arbour’s organization also calls for improved ties with Eritrea in spite of their strong reproach of the Eritrean government. The report also calls on the UN Security Council to pressure Ethiopia to accept the unenforced border ruling. We would like to know why the CBC did not deem it relevant to report on the implications of the non-implementation of the EEBC (Eritrea Ethiopia Boundary Commission) ruling and the negative impact it has had on the Horn of Africa’s humanitarian and security situation.

We urge the CBC to balance its news reports and afford us respect as Canadian readers. We are disappointed and dismayed that while your national writing staff had readily available facts to help write an accurate and balanced story, they chose not to seek them out. We request corrections to the factual inaccuracies in this story and request an opportunity to rebut the content of this article based on all the foregoing points.

Regards,
Lambros Kyriakakos
Acting Chairperson,
Coalition of Eritrean Canadian Communities and Organizations (CECCO)

CC.
Hon. Shelly Glover, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages
Mr. Hubert T. Lacroix, CBC President and CEO
Ms. Esther Enkin, CBC Ombudsman
Mr. Norm Kelly, Deputy Mayor of the City of Toronto

About Us: The CECCO is an organization that represents Eritrean-Canadian communities across Canada. The primary purpose of this body is to represent the interests of Canadians of Eritrean descent with a collective voice and to promote the friendship and good relations between Canada and Eritrea.

Web: <http://www.eritreacanada.org/> Twitter: [@EritreaCanada](https://twitter.com/EritreaCanada)

⁷ *Eritrea: The Siege state*, the International Crisis Group, Africa Report No 163—21 September 2010, p. 25