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دولة إرتريا
وزارة الشؤون الخارجية

The State of Eritrea
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Press Statement

UNHCR: Part of the Problem of Illegal Migration

Early this week, the Ethiopian spokesperson of the UNHCR Office in Addis Abeba announced that “6,200 Eritreans had crossed into Ethiopia” in the months of October and November. This news has been picked up by various news agencies to conjure up a non-existent image of Eritrea and/or as part and parcel of the smear campaigns that are routinely waged against the country and its government.

Leaving the sinister motives aside, what are the real facts?

1. Migration and population movements are complex continental and global phenomena whose ebbs and flows are influenced by intertwined push and pull factors.
2. In the case of Eritrea, the pull factors have been immensely augmented in recent years by deliberate policies of certain governments and agencies who chose to encourage, for sinister political purposes, the youth to defect from the National Military Service through various inducements. Slanderous labeling of the prolonged National Service as “slave or forced labour” was and is peddled to spice up and rationalize these policies. What is conveniently glossed over here is the fact that the mandatory, 18-months period, National Military Service is prolonged solely because of Ethiopia’s occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories and its continued belligerence in breach of international law.
3. The deliberate policies of weaning the youth from the mandatory National Service coupled with frantic activities by organized human trafficking have resulted in pull factors that eclipse normative and cyclical economic push factors that prevail in every country at any given point in time.
4. The UNHCR itself has become, for over ten years now, an unwitting catalyst in bolstering the pull factors by invariably categorizing all Eritrean migrants as “prima facie asylum seekers”. In the event, it is odd for the UNHCR to

issue intermittent statements or shed crocodile tears “on the increasing number of Eritrean asylum seekers”.

5. The Government of Eritrea knows full well the origins, underlying reasons and ultimate objectives of the various machinations that have been set in motion in the past years to induce the illegal migration of the youth from the country. That is why it requested the UN Secretary General to conduct a comprehensive inquiry into the various facets of organized human trafficking. This is also why it is currently involved in the regional efforts at curbing illegal migration and human trafficking. The UNHCR can be part of this constructive process if it is really prepared to review its past, misguided, policies.

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