

Media Briefing
on
Deliberation on Human Rights Situation in Eritrea
at the 7th Citizens Continental Conference
Held from 26 to 28 January, 2017
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

In 2016 a delegation composed of different Eritrean civic and political organizations participated in the 6th Citizens Continental Conference (CCC), where a statement with regards to the human rights situation in Eritrea was issued. This year, another delegation of Eritrean activists, namely Dr Asia Abdulkadir, Dr Bereket Berhane, Ms Helen Gebreab, Mr Michael Embaye and Dr Adane Ghebremeskel attended the 7th CCC representing different civic organizations.

During the three day conference, the human rights situation in Eritrea was debated in a plenary session as well as in a dedicated parallel event. Moderated by Dr Adane, the parallel event provided a space for Dr Asia (the representative of the Eritrean Diaspora in East Africa (EDEA) and the Network of Eritrean Women (NEW)) to present on the state of Eritrean women. These women especially the young women, suffer sexual slavery at the hands of Eritrean military officials during their national military service. Dr Asia also highlighted women's ordeal at the hands of human traffickers and religious militant groups like ISIS, while fleeing their country.

Dr Bereket, on his part, talked about the root causes, features and implications of the forced migration of Eritreans, especially of those unaccompanied children who constituted more than 25 percent of the Eritrean refugee groups in the Ethiopian refugee camps.

Ms Helen a refugee and a recent arrival from Eritrea shared her ordeal with the participants. From the day she was conscripted to the national military service at the age of 17 until she crossed the border as a 24 year old, she was imprisoned a number of times and severely tortured. To date, she suffers serious physical and psychological trauma as a refugee in Ethiopia.

During the plenary session, Dr Adane presented on the responses of the African Union to the deteriorating human rights situation in Eritrea. He reminded the participants that a number of African countries have been playing an important role following the deployment of the Special Rapporteur and the UN Human Rights Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea (COIE). On the basis of the series of reports that were published by the Special Rapporteur and COIE, the UN Human Rights Council recommended that the African Union should establish an accountability mechanism on the situation in Eritrea. However, the African Union is yet to consider the recommendations and make practical steps to that effect. Dr Adane also underlined that the situation in Eritrea meets all the criteria of an emerging crisis, which necessitate AU response under the principle of conflict prevention.

During the discussions a number of relevant suggestions were made by participants that would aid to amplify the voice of the suffering people of Eritrea and support the advocacy of Eritrean human rights defenders. Eventually, the house agreed to include the following points *inter alia* in the final communique of the 7th CCC:

"The 7th CCC expressed its concerns on the ongoing widespread and systematic human rights violation in Eritrea and its resultant consequences in the form of mass migration of young people putting their lives at risk to reach of places of safety.

Thus the 7th CCC calls upon the AU and its memebre states to:

Endorse the 2016 report of UN Human Rights Commission of Enquiry on Eritrea (COIE) whose findings were accepted by the UN Human Rights Council and called upon the African Union to establish accountability mechanisms on human rights situation in Eritrea;

Establish an accountability mechanism with immediate effect to abate the deteriorating human rights situation in Eritrea and bring into the fore the dignity and sanctity of humanity before the national sovereignty;

Increase their efforts in protecting Eritrean refugees and ease their suffering by providing necessary amenities to have a dignified life in their host countries;

Urge African civil society to lend their solidarity and support to Eritrean human rights defender in their efforts in amplifying the precarious human rights, protection of Eritrean refugees' rights and advocating towards instituting accountability mechanism by African Union."

The final communique of the 7th CCC will be published in the coming days. It will also be presented at the appropriate forums of the African Union.

The Citizens Continental Conference is convened by the Centre of Citizens Participation in the African Union. It is an alternative continental space where African civil society and citizens share, discuss and deliberate issues, ideas and strategies and express Pan-African solidarity. It is held annually on the side of the African Union Heads of State and Government.

The African Advocacy Coalition for Eritrea

30th January 2017, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.