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Is Eritrea a Safe Country to which Asylum-Seekers can be returned?

On 30th April 2019 Eritrea's Information Minister, Mr. Yemane G. Meskel told the world that his government summoned the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees Residential Representative in Asmara, Eritrea to Reprimand the UN organization for not forcibly returning Eritrean asylum seekers to Eritrea.

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Yemane G. Meskel
@hawelti

#Eritrea's Foreign Ministry summoned today UNHCR Res. Rep. to protest against latter's unwarranted acts to hamper GOE efforts to bring home its citizens stranded in Libya. UNHCR has sent some Eritreans to desolate camp in Niger under promise of "resettlement in third countries"

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UNHCR transferred Eritrean Refugees and Asylum-Seekers from war-torn Libya to Niger, whilst awaiting the agreement of a safe third country to resettle them there. Human Rights Concern-Eritrea fully supports this action by UNHCR.

Why is this issue so important? And why is it totally unsafe for Eritreans who have left their country to be returned to it?

Dangers to Eritreans facing Repatriation to Eritrea

It is important that the world is made aware of the dangers to Eritrean Refugees being returned to their country of origin.

- Anyone who has escaped from Eritrea without government permission to leave is regarded as a traitor who has committed a crime according to the legal system in operation under the present regime in Eritrea.
- Returnees have to sign a "repentance" form and accept ill-defined punishment for this law-breaking confession.
- Upon return, Eritrean asylum-seekers face incommunicado detention, torture, inhumane and degrading treatment for undetermined, extended periods of time.

On what evidence is this analysis based? Why can we be sure of its truth?

Human Rights Concern – Eritrea has interviewed former returnees, who were forcibly returned from Malta, Libya and Egypt.

These are also the **Conclusions** of the **UN Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry into the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea on Forced Repatriations**. These are the considered assessments of highly-respected UN experts who studied the question in great detail and took evidence from many witnesses. They reported that: -

“A common pattern of treatment of returnees is their arrest upon arrival in Eritrea. They are questioned about the circumstances of their escape, whether they received help to leave the country, how the flight was funded, whether they had contact with opposition groups based abroad, etc. Returnees are systematically ill-treated to the point of torture during the interrogation phase. After interrogation, they are detained in particularly harsh conditions, designed to ensure that they will not escape again. Returnees who spoke to the Commission were held in prison for between eight months and three years. Witnesses who spoke to the Commission noted the severe conditions during their detention. They were made to undertake forced labour and were frequently punished by prison guards.”

“The Commission finds that, with a few exceptions, those who have been forced to return to the country have been arrested, detained and subjected to ill-treatment and torture. Other Eritreans returning to their country may face arbitrary arrest, particularly if they are perceived as having associated with opposition movements abroad.”

Elizabeth Chyrum, Director of Human Rights Concern-Eritrea (HRCE), commented:

“It is high time that the whole world recognised the extreme dangers facing refugees from Eritrea who are attempting to claim asylum in other countries. It is entirely erroneous to regard them as economic migrants. They are fleeing widespread and repeated human rights abuses by the regime in Eritrea, and a National Service regime without time limit which enslaves them for life. It is vital that the criticisms of the UNHCR levelled by the Eritrean regime against vital protections afforded to these Eritrean refugees are seen for what they are – unjustified attempts to secure forced repatriations of endangered citizens whom the regime wishes to silence.

All member countries of the UN need to accept the validity of the evidence presented by HRCE the UN Commission of Inquiry and to recognise the extreme dangers faced by any Eritreans being repatriated to their country, and their undoubted and genuine right to claim asylum and full protection elsewhere.”

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