

**ASSEMBLY OF TRADITIONAL REPRESENTATIVES FOR AFAR
NATION IN ERITREA (MAJLIS-AL-AAYAN)**

Majlis Al-Aayan

General Assembly of Eritrean Afar, Dankalia

March 26, 2015

Brief description of Afar people in Eritrea

The Eritrean Afar are an ancient indigenous people. The Afar are long-established first nation inhabitants of the region called the Horn of Africa. The south-eastern region along the coastline of the Red Sea of Eritrea is the Afar's traditional homeland, known as Dankalia. The Afar have lived in this homeland, a well-defined territory stretching from the northern tip of Massawa to Rahayta in the south bordering Djibouti and the surrounding enclaves of Dankalia for over a millennia, long before the inception of current Eritrean identity or nation state.

Historically the Afar nation has put up fierce resistance to foreign occupations and internal colonization by defending their people, lands and properties. Thanks to this resistance, by in large the Afar territories remained intact and undivided by the aggression of others who came to colonize them. It is in these territories that the indigenous Afar have governed themselves autonomously, according to their customary laws, legal systems (Madqas) and traditional values. It is in accordance to these laws and indigenous systems that they exercised autonomous rule, exerted control over their societies, land and resources, carried out their day-to-day economic activities and made peace treaties and conflict resolutions with those who came in conflict with them in their territories.

The Afar in Eritrea have a distinct physical character and way of life, practise a moderate form of Islam and a culture which is considerably different from the dominant society.

Geographically, the Afar region has been isolated from outsiders until recently. Afar territories and seacoasts contain untapped reservoirs of natural resources, marine life and vast potash deposits with other precious metals. Dankalia is home to the country's two main port cities, Assab and Massawa, which are economically and strategic to Eritrea's future. Geopolitically, Dankalia's red sea coast is also significant for international trade, oil transit routes and critical for regional national security interests.

Current situation of Afar Nation in Eritrea

Today our people (the Eritrean Afar) in Dankalia are under threat of extinction. Social engineering intended to reconstruct and redesign Dankalia and the Afar traditions to reflect the interests of the majority ruling class is underway. Dankalia is divided into two regions. In 1997, the Eritrean government proclaimed that all Afar land and natural resources belong to the

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State. This policy is now enforced. Our people have no rights or say over their land, sea or natural resources crucial to their subsistence. The Afar today have no rights to protect the use of traditional lands or the right to participate in the development of their communities. All economic activities, including animal husbandry and trade, salt mining and traditional fishing economies are severely restricted. Accesses to border towns in neighboring countries have now been closed. As a consequence, Afar communities have the highest maternal and infant mortality average and remain most impoverished group in the country.

After the social engineering came the violence. The government of Eritrea is removing the Afar from their homeland in Dankalia and colonizing the area by forcibly resettling Tigrinya into the traditional Afar area. To remove the Afar, the Eritrean government is using mass murder, terror, intimidation and other forms of violence to destroy the basis of the Afar economy.

The Afar are fleeing their homeland in Dankalia by the tens of thousands into neighboring countries like Djibouti, Ethiopia, Yemen and Sudan. Those who remained behind live under constant fear, discrimination, forced assimilations and domination of their culture. They are subjected to marginalization both politically and socially. Expropriations of their land and properties have led them into poverty and hunger. In short, our people (the indigenous Afar) are faced with 'ethnocide' and major 'crimes against humanity' in Eritrea.

Some references to Afar predicament by international and regional actors in Eritrea.....

The United Nations (UNSR)

In May 2013, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Eritrea investigated human rights violations against Afar in Eritrea, arriving at the conclusion that the Eritrean regime has been systematically targeting the Eritrean Afar people with "extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and rape" in order to "force [them] into displacement from their traditional territory" along the Red Sea.¹

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

In Feb 2015, Human Rights Watch, in its annual World Report 2015, describes the situation of the Afar as follows: "Members of the Afar and Kunama ethnic groups flee because of land expropriations and discrimination by the government".²

African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)

In 2006, "Indigenous Peoples in Africa: The Forgotten Peoples":

The African Commission's work on indigenous peoples in Africa has recognized the Afar as being one of many African indigenous peoples.³

¹http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session23/A.HRC.23.53_ENG.pdf

² <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/eritrea>

³ http://www.achpr.org/files/special-mechanisms/indigenous-populations/achpr_wgip_report_summary_version_eng.pdf

THE DJIBOUTI DECLARATION

March 26, 2015

We, the traditional representatives of Eritrean Afar people (Majlis-Al-Aayan), representatives of Afar Sultan of Bidu and the Sultan of Rahayta in Dankalia, leaders of various tribal chiefs (Makabon) and religious leaders, representatives of exiled Afar and Eritrean Afar refugee communities together declare to the World the solemn will of the Eritrean Afar People.

- 1. WE REAFFIRM the Principles of the Samara Declaration to which the Leaders the Afar People solemnly committed in Samara on the 26th of July, 2010;**
- 2. It is now evident that the Afar identity and existence as special indigenous people in Eritrea are under threat. WE CONDEMN the “ethnocide” and “crimes against humanity” of our brothers and sisters in our ancestral homeland in Eritrea;**
- 3. WE CALL for the establishment of autonomous Afar government (Afar State) in Dankalia within a unified Eritrea and restoration of Dankalia traditional borders to those enjoyed by the Afar people prior to the independence of Eritrea (1991);**
- 4. WE DECLARE that it is the solemn will of the Eritrean Afar people and traditional representative assembly (Majlis-Al-Aayan) to participate in a reformed Eritrea on the basis of a liberal democratic federation, principles of Freedom, autonomy and equality for all nationalities;**
- 5. WE CALL for a new constitution that reflects and protects the diversity of Eritrean nation and protects the rights of indigenous people and minority groups;**

6. **WE EXTEND OUR HANDS** to our brother and sister nationalities in Eritrea to work in concert to restore the dignity of individuals in Eritrea, protect the human rights of all Eritreans and safe guard their peace and security, and end the economic hardships of our fellow citizens.
7. **WE PLEDGE** to our brother and sister nationalities in Eritrea, under Afar self-rule, the resources, ports, fisheries, minerals, and strategic benefits of Danaklia shall contribute to the national coffers (treasury) to the benefit of the development of the entire nation and not a selected few.

CALL TO INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

- **We call on the United Nations Human Rights Council to recognize what is happening to Afar in Eritrea for what it is: “ethnocide” and “crimes against humanity”.**
- **We call on the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, to investigate atrocities against Indigenous Afar under her mandate and provide protection for Afar indigenous rights to guarantee and preserve their land and resources, the vitality of their language, culture, way of life and economy.**
- **We call on the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, to work closely with Afar leadership and advisors to expedite the process of recognition for the indigenous rights of our people in Eritrea.**
- **We call on the UN Human Rights Council and International Criminal Court (ICC) to bring President Issais Afwerki and his generals, who**

are responsible for the crimes against Afar in Eritrea, to face the full extent of the law.

- We call on the UNHCR and international NGOs to extend their services to desperate Eritrean Afar refugees and exiled Afar in the regions of Yemen, Sudan and Saudi Arabia.

CALL TO FELLOW ERITREANS:

- Despite all the atrocities committed against the Afar Nation in Eritrea, the Afar people and their representatives (Majlis-Al-Aayan) believe Eritrea worth protecting as a Nation State;
- Eritrean Afar and their representatives (Majlis-Al-Aayan) are committed to the sovereignty of Eritrea and the nation building process;
- Dankalia and Eritrean Afar are crucial components for Eritrea's economic growth and are critical strategic allies for regional stability, peaceful coexistence. The Afar Eritrean are against racism, discrimination and are against the expansion of terrorism.
- Afar Eritreans call on our fellow Eritreans, regardless of your ethnic and religious backgrounds, to stand along your Afar brothers and sisters and ask you to lend a helping hand on these unprecedented times of challenge and uncertainty.

We, Secretariat of MAJLIS-AL-AAYAN and representatives of Eritrean Afar pledge our commitment and resolve to these solemn principles.

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