



Eritrean Afar State in Exile(EASE)

Restoring the Dignity of the Eritrean Afar People Democratically
"Eretriyah Qafarih Konnabna Demokraasil Daabisenno"



November 19th, 2016

An Open Letter to Mr. Brian Hayes (MEP)

RE: Displacement and Land Grab of Afar in Eritrea

Dear Mr. Hayes

I am writing to you in my capacity as President of the Eritrean Afar State in Exile (EASE).

It came to my attention that you're planning a discussion on development opportunities in Eritrea. I understand you're hosting Eritrea's information Minister Yemane Gebremeskel and Representative of Danakali Potash Corporation (formerly South Boulder Mines Ltd).

EASE and the Afar Eritreans unequivocally denounce the exploitation of Afar natural resources, displacement of our people from their traditional and ancestral lands and properties in Eritrea.

Background on Afar human rights violation in Eritrea

Soon after taking power in 1991, the Eritrean Government released land proclamation calling itself the "sole proprietor" of Eritrea's lands, natural resources below and above the surface. Making it legal to sell or lease Afar natural resources to foreign corporations and foreign states. Complete disregard to indigenous Afar land and property, their customary law and their way of life. (See Eritrea's Proclamation, Articles 2, 3, 8 "[Proclamation No. 58/1994](#)")

On May 2013, Government-owned Eritrean National Mining Corporation (ENAMCO) signed 50-50 a joint venture with Danakali (South Boulder Mines). The Afar region has one of the largest unexplored potash basins globally with over 6Bt of potassium bearing salts suitable for the production of potash fertilisers. It's well known fact that Eritrea's companies are partly owned by Eritrea's military leaders and the Generals. The Collili Potash mine is estimated to have a production life of more than 200 years, an area spanning over 400km².

With its land grab policy in place, the Government of Eritrea is clearing ways by removing the Afar from these resource rich and strategic areas in Eritrea.

As Afar leaders, we have taken Eritrea's gross human right violations to the international community.

The Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea (COI) whose years of investigation validated Afar allegations of a series of human right violations and persecutions in Eritrea. Commission's findings concluded as follows:

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In June 5, 2015- Report, Paragraphs 1157:

Land traditionally belonging to or used by the Afars was seized in the framework of the Land reform and afterwards by decision of the Government, without consultation of the impacted communities;

http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoIEritrea/A_HRC_29_CRP-1.pdf

The COI report also stated the actions by Eritrean authority “may be construed as an intentional act to dispossess them [the Afar] of their ancestral lands, their livelihood and their culture” (Paragraph 1171) and that:

The killing of members of the Afar ethnic group and reports of existence of Mass-graves... have also triggered their displacement from their lands within the country and across borders to Ethiopia and Djibouti. This has posed great difficulty to their livelihoods as they depend on their traditional lands for the sustenance as an indigenous ethnic group,” (Para 1120b).

In June 8, 2016 Report (Paragraph-295-296) read as follows:

“The Commission also has reasonable grounds to believe that Eritrean officials have intentionally and severely deprived Eritrean Kunama and Afar of fundamental rights contrary to international law on ethnic grounds”

...and that:

“The Commission finds that Eritrean officials have committed the crime of persecution, a crime against humanity, in a large-scale and routine manner since May 1991”.

http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoIEritrea/A_HRC_32_CRP.1_read-only.pdf

Dear Mr. Hayes,

Where is the accountability to uphold the corporate social responsibility and the respect for human rights in Eritrea?

The Australian Corporation’s way of fulfilling its corporate social responsibility to the Afar people has so far been the changing of its original name from “South Boulder Mines Ltd” to an indigenous Afar name of Danakali, This is adding insult to injury.

In its corporate promotional video released on modus operandi for potash production in Eritrea, South Boulder Mines(now Danakali) says, “No Known social or environmental issues”, impacting the Afar , (see here corporation’s promotional video, 0’50) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRorNspk9hY>

Dear Mr. Hayes,

This is not a development for Eritrean people; this is ultimate land grab and displacement policy by Eritrean officials. And Australia’s Corporation is making the Afar displacement possible in Eritrea.

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The European parliament has the moral obligation to protect the Afar rights and innocent Eritrean people from repressive and exploitative authoritarian Government of Eritrea and its unaccountable partners globally.

Finally,

The allegations of atrocities against Afar in Eritrea have been confirmed by United Nations organs, international human rights groups and independent investigators. The Afar persecution is ongoing; the threat to thousands of Afar people is immediate.

The Afar Eritreans call up on you Sir, to continue to bring the plight of our people, the expropriation of our lands and the exploitation of our natural resources to the attention of European parliament.

Our legal counsel is aware of multiple displacement and exploitations of Afar properties involving multinational corporations and foreign States in Afar region (Dankalia).

We encourage you to facilitate a dialogue with our legal team and involved parties.

I look forward to your positive exchange on these issues related to development opportunities in Afar region in Eritrea.

Yours truly,

Ahmed Youssouf Mohamed
President
Eritrean Afar State in Exile (EASE)

CC: Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission

CC: Mr. Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament

CC: Professor Joseph Magnet, Legal Counsel to the Afar nation

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