



Part III

Mr Yemane Gebreab's rebuttal to the Commission of Inquiry Report on Human Rights in Eritrea (June 2016) does not reflect factual reality on the ground.

Introduction

In this piece we aim to highlight some of the discrepancies of Mr Yemane's rebuttal to the COI. In particular we will address the issues of Human Rights, Eritrean asylum seekers, the Eritrean constitution, women under PFDJ, religious freedom, cultural erosion, supporters of the regime, and the regime's policy of division and impoverishment of the Eritrean society. In order to make it more convenient for readers it is published in 3 parts and it ends with concluding remarks.

*Part I explored the extent to which the PFDJ regime violated Human Rights, it refuted Mr Yeman Gebreaab's claim about the number and motive of Eritrean asylum seekers, and the Eritrean Constitution. Part II addressed issues related to women and its adverse effects in society. **Part III** (and final) follows.*

No religious freedom

The Eritrean regime bans some religious denominations and restricts others. It does seem to work against religious values. For example, adherents of Pentecostal or other minorities are not allowed to practice their faith. Hence they are forced to conduct their prayers clandestinely. If the regime finds them their Bible is taken from them and ripped in front of the owners, they are herded to detention centres which include shipment containers where survivors confirm that they were treated in degrading conditions [19]. Believing in God and reading the Bible should never be a crime. What the regime is doing is in clear violation of Article 18 of the Declaration of Human Rights: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.' The regime must stop these abuses of innocent citizens, and release those it has detained immediately.

It is often mistakenly believed that 4 religious denominations are allowed to practice in Eritrea. However, a closer look at the Eritrean regime's behaviour suggests that it is determined to create a society devoid of religious values (and any decent values) in the long run. The regime bans some denominations, and it encroaches in the internal affairs of those it allows to operate. For example, the primate of the Orthodox Church,



Patriarch Abune Antonios has been under house arrest for refusing the regime's infringement in the Church's internal affairs. After his arrest, many of his clergy and members of the faithful were also put behind bars. Then the regime gained control of the affairs of the Church including its financial assets. Many of the Church's clergy have fled the country and are led by the exiled courageous, outspoken and visibly wise bishop Abune Makarios now living in the USA. Many of the monasteries where future clergymen get their training are emptied due to the mandatory and indefinite military servitude.

These churches had publications which remained functional during the Menghistu era, but the PFDJ regime has now closed them. This is further indicative that the regime's long term plan is daunting for religious values.

Mr Yemane's cadres are assigned to divide the Orthodox Church within itself: between those who follow the legitimate but arrested Patriarch on the one hand and those who give their allegiance to the one who was handpicked by the regime. On top of that the regime works hard to create discord between this church and other Christian denomination. And between Christians and Muslims. This helps the regime to divide and rule the Eritrean people. Clearly we need separation of church and state; that is what Mr Yemane should do if he wants to be taken seriously.

Creating division amongst Eritrean society

Eritreans know so well that the PFDJ regime has been working hard to create division amongst the Eritrean society. Many decent citizens are astonished by scale of divisiveness of the regime. Mr Yemane's regime first started pretending to privilege its ex-freedom fighters against the interests of the civilian population. This was soon followed by the more venomous regional and tribal rivalry created by the regime: demonizing some and pretending to favour others when the real goal is to exercise absolute control of power. For example, when the regime unlawfully arrested its most formidable reformist critics from within its high ranking officials, the G-15, Mr Yemane's defamatory machine falsely accused them of being regionally motivated, then of treason and defeatism TESEARINET. In fact they hailed from all of the Eritrean regions. The regime arrested them in violation of all privileges accorded to citizens and in violation of their presumed parliamentary immunity. Since September 2002 they have been detained incommunicado, some of them are reported dead, others developed serious health issues and some lost their eyesight because of ill treatment and lack of medical treatment [21].

Apart from the clear violation of their parliamentary immunity and their basic rights to recourse to the court of law, the regime has never allowed their loved ones to see them. It is bemusing to hear Mr Yemane Gebreab talking about their spouses being allowed to enjoy the same privileges they enjoyed before their arrest, which clearly is neither



true nor relevant to the subject under discussion. When he says they were military commanders he is trying to justify the violation of their basic human rights such as incommunicado detention in degrading treatment. He does entertain the idea that if someone is a soldier, the regime has the right to do anything it wishes to them. Hence why the regime makes every citizen go through this military ritual – including the elderly. For him, if one is a soldier they have to obey blindly or face the brunt of the regime's secret services. Thankfully Mr Yemane betrayed his own argument by a slip of tongue saying that some of the G-15 were in the government with him.

Cultural erosion

The Eritrean regime has consistently been eroding our noble culture and proud identity, under the pretext of Cultural Revolution, inspired by the failed communist ideology of the last century. The regime introduced many alien and often damaging practices forcefully when the society clearly does not want them. Rather bizarrely, however, Mr Yemane Gebreab talked about the Eritrean culture being the reason why women are not raped under his regime. It is strange to see the master minder of cultural erosion in Eritrea speaking highly of the very culture he has been destroying purposely.

Eritreans are widely known for their rule of law, mutual respect, respect for individuals including guests and migrants. Amongst other things we Eritreans are known for telling the truth as it is and for our unassuming character. It is hard to imagine how he learnt such deceptive behaviour. We Eritreans do respect the dead, and we support the needy amongst us. We comfort the bereaved and we visit the sick. These noble practices are visible amongst Eritreans wherever they are.

Mr Yemane knows that his PFDJ is at odds with most of the things that define what it is to be an Eritrean. His regime forbids families from grieving their loved ones. The regime forbids churches from saying prayers for those who perish in the successive tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea, in the Desert and in the borders. When those poor 359 souls died in Lampedusa, Eritreans planned to return them home for dignified burial and for their families to have some form of closure. Unfortunately the Eritrean regime refused them entry. When the family of Mr Nayzghi Kiflu, a lifelong colleague of the high ranking PFDJ leadership, tried to return his body from London to bury him in his own Eritrea the regime refused them. If one disagrees with the regime they are punished harshly, incommunicado. If one escapes from the regime, they are punished even in death. This means the regime is happy to inflict pain on the parents, spouses, and children of the deceased. This is alien to the Eritrean culture, and Mr Yemane knows that; but we do not understand why he is engaged in deceptive campaign.

Here is a regime at war with the dead and with the families of the dead, against anything that comforts the bereaved, trying to lecture about our culture. Unless they want to inflict pain and humiliation on their people, no one seems to understand the



purpose and gains of the regime's practices. Mr Yemane, your regime lacks compassion, empathy and common sense unheard in our society before your regime came to the fore. Please reverse these damaging trends, or come to the people's camp before it is too late.

Policy of impoverishment

The Eritrean regime has literally been destroying residential houses rendering many citizens homeless. There seems no logic in doing this action except to inflict pain on the population. In the same vein it has effectively confiscated every citizen's money in what is believed to be the enforcement of its policy of deprivation in order to achieve total control of the population. The regime now has total control of how much of your money you should spend, as it has effectively confiscated everyone's money. It appears that the regime has a policy of impoverishing all Eritreans in the long run. We will not talk about the regime's failed economic policy or lack of governmental budget, or lack of financial accountability here.

Supporters of the regime

One other perplexing concept brought by the Eritrean regime's representative is when he claimed that many thousands of Eritreans signed against the findings of the COI. However, this argument does not stand because the COI's findings are about the human rights violation suffered by Eritreans perpetrated by the regime. If the victims who suffered such violations express their pain and loss of their loved ones at the hands of the regime in Eritrea, what right do the supporters of the regime, living abroad, have to tell the Commission otherwise? Most Eritreans know, and the world knows by now, that the victims of the Eritrean regime can show endless evidence to substantiate their claim.

The only way the regime could prove its innocence would be by providing evidence in support of its claim. It could do that, for example, by implementing the constitution and implementing the rule of law; by abolishing lawlessness, by stopping and holding its operatives accountable for all the wrongdoings and violations they committed. The regime could also stop intimidating citizens at home and abroad for opposing its nihilist ideology. To this end supporters of the PFDJ regime should insist and influence the regime to reverse its course and refrain itself from annihilating the country altogether. The regime must understand that its actions and omissions are creating vulnerability in our country endangering the nation for many years to come.

In conclusion: Mr Yemane Gebreab's rebuttal to the COI is based on deception and he lacks basic decency. We are extremely concerned that the regime is determined to do more of what it has been doing to the Eritrean people. Mr Yemane must understand that his regime's policies and practices are obliterating Eritrea. The regime would be



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better advised to behave like a state and practice as such instead of denying the multifaceted malpractices existing in Eritrea. In the absence of good will from the regime, supporters of the regime would do the right thing if they would decide to side with Eritrean people and stand against oppression and all forms of human rights violations in Eritrea. They must be warned that: rape, forced disappearances, torture, illegal detention and killings, indefinite servitude, and the unhealthy social engineering will cost every Eritrean dearly for decades to come.

The fact that our suffering and existential threat is recognized by international community will give Eritreans some form of catharsis and some form of encouragement in countering the threats hovering over us. In the end, nonetheless, it will be up to every Eritrean citizen to save our country by participating in the national discourse. Therefore, we call upon all Eritreans to recognize the urgency of our country's situation and work as hard as they can to build a body that is robust enough to save our people. Every Eritrean justice seeking group should make every effort to build working relationships with other groups in their vicinity and aim to unite with other groups.

Unity of all Eritreans is the only way to achieve what we all aspire for our people: rule of law, the right to live in dignity, accountable and transparent work ethos, ensure that the rights of all citizens' rights, including that of women and children, are respected. We believe this should be the criteria for true and responsible nation building, against which all Eritreans should be judged.

All Eritreans must demand UNITY of ALL ERITREAN JUSTICE SEEKERS to CO-ORDINATE every effort under ONE UMBRELLA for the SALVATION of the Eritrean people.

References

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