



## THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY IN ERITREA

The dictatorship of Isaias Afeworki in Eritrea is causing hardship and oppression within the country, and destabilising the Horn of Africa. With this document, the newly-formed Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change aims to raise awareness in the international community of the dangers of the Eritrean regime, and to set out our strategy for change.

### The current situation in Eritrea

Eritrea gained its independence from neighbouring Ethiopia in 1991, after 30 years of armed struggle. The forces of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front formed the present People's Front for Democracy and Justice Government, and at once created a one-party state and banned opposition movements from the country. A constitution was agreed but has never been implemented, leaving a dictatorship led by Isaias Afeworki, who has maintained absolute power ever since.

Freedom of speech is non-existent in Eritrea; the only remaining newspaper is state-run, all others having been banned and their journalists imprisoned. Many Eritreans, young and old, male and female, have been detained without trial at some time. Education is inextricably linked with military service, the final years of schooling taking place in military camps around the country. The country's only university has been closed. Military service is compulsory and indefinite. Abduction and rape of young women by senior military figures and other powerful men are widespread and conducted with impunity. In the recent drought across the Horn of Africa, Eritreans have been left in poverty, Isaias having banned all international NGOs throughout the twenty years of his regime. Eritreans in the diaspora, regardless of their political views, are forced to contribute 2% of their earnings to support this corrupt regime.

Eritrea has become a danger to its neighbours and a powerfully destabilising force in the region. In the past twenty years, it has been at war with every neighbouring country: not only Ethiopia, but Sudan, Djibouti and Yemen. An estimated seventy to one hundred thousand people have been killed or displaced in these wholly unnecessary conflicts. In addition, the regime provides support



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to the Al-Shabaab Islamic militants in Somalia, prolonging the suffering of that country and further endangering much of East Africa and the Arabian peninsula.

The regime has created many thousands of refugees, living in camps in Sudan and Ethiopia, as well as fleeing into Yemen, Libya, Israel and the West. Recent investigations have uncovered the scandal of Eritrean refugees in Sinai being killed for body parts which are sold to other countries: the Eritrean regime has been shown to profit directly from these appalling transactions. The UN Security Council Resolution 2023 (2011) provides further detail of the crimes of the regime; the UN has imposed ever stricter sanctions in 2005, 2009 and 2011.

### **A united opposition**

The Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change (ENC4DC) was formed in November 2011, at a conference in Awasa, Ethiopia of 600 elected delegates from across the entire Diaspora, representing opposition groups, human rights activists and civil society organisations. Groups which had been in conflict realised the necessity of combining forces to bring about change. The conference elected 127 council members from all continents, who connect actively with grass-roots Eritreans and introduce the Council's work to national governments and parliaments. The work of the Council has given hope especially to young people, and the youth movement is growing rapidly. The Council has already shown up major cracks in the edifice of the Eritrean regime, and demonstrated that the dictatorship is beginning to lose its hold.

The ENC4DC aims to mobilise Eritreans within and outside the country to create a peaceful democratic government, and to raise awareness across the international community of the true state of affairs. It is a tolerant, multicultural movement, where the diverse ethnic and faith groups, women and men, old and young can engage constructively in creating their own democratic society. We seek to educate the Eritrean people and enable their active participation in a process leading to democracy; and to expose the deeds of the regime. We are also engaged in making connections and building trust with neighbouring countries, with a view to repairing the damage caused by twenty years of conflict. We have ties with the African Union and with the diplomats of many other nations.

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### How you can help

We are asking politicians, NGOs and concerned individuals in other countries to support the transition to democracy in Eritrea in a number of ways:

raising awareness with national governments and inter-governmental bodies of the issue of Eritrea and the destabilising activities of the regime  
urging governments to break diplomatic ties with the totalitarian regime  
pressing for sanctions against the economic support to the regime by multinational companies involved in gold-mining within Eritrea  
exposing the regime's use of cultural events to camouflage hostile intelligence activities within the diaspora  
demanding that interpreters and other intermediaries are vetted to prevent the leaking of confidential information about political opponents of the regime to the government in Asmara.

The Eritrean people have suffered for decades; they deserve to have a strong, responsive, multi-party democracy where their rights and those of their national neighbours are respected, and conflicts are resolved through dialogue and negotiation. Please help us to achieve this.

**Tzeggai Yohannes Deres**

**Chairman of the Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change**

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