

SADC-CNGO



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PRESS STATEMENT

for IMMEDIATE RELEASE

African Union must immediately respond to crime against humanity in Eritrea

The SADC Council of NGOs, on behalf of the Regional Solidarity Task Team¹ is alarmed by escalating human rights violations in Eritrea as detailed in the just published report of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea (COI). The COI was established for a period of one year by the Human Rights Council through its resolution 26/24 of 27 June 2014 on the “situation of human rights in Eritrea”.

In its report the COI states that:

“... systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations have been and are being committed by the Government of Eritrea and that there is no accountability for them. The enjoyment of rights and freedoms are severely curtailed in an overall context of a total lack of rule of law...widespread extrajudicial executions, torture (including sexual torture), national service and forced labour that may constitute crimes against humanity...Faced with a seemingly hopeless situation they feel powerless to change, hundreds of thousands of Eritreans are fleeing their country... In desperation, they resort to deadly escape routes through deserts and neighbouring war-torn countries and across dangerous seas in search of safety. They risk capture, torture and death at the hands of ruthless human traffickers. To ascribe their decision to leave solely to economic reasons is to ignore the dire situation of human rights in Eritrea and the very real suffering of its people. Eritreans are fleeing severe human rights violations in their country and are in need of international protection.”²

The 10th Southern African Civil Society Forum (CSF) resolved to highlight and mobilise regional and continental solidarity with the people of Eritrea. The Eritrean Delegation, during the inaugural consultative meeting of the Regional Solidarity Task Team held Johannesburg, South Africa in December 2014 briefed the meeting in detail about the extent and manifestations of the gross human rights violations in Eritrea. Alarmed by the silence of the African Union on the plight and suffering of the Eritreans, the consultative meeting noted the

¹ The Regional Solidarity Task Team is composed of representatives from regional CS apex organization, namely the Southern Africa Trade Union Co-ordination Council (SATUCC), Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa (FOCCISA), the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and Southern African Development Community – Council of NGOs (SADC-CNGOs). The Task Team was established by the resolution of the 10th Southern African Civil Society Forum (CSF) convened between 27th and 31st July 2014, Harare, Zimbabwe.

² <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16054&LangID=E>

ongoing gross human rights violations perpetrated by the Eritrean government and called on the African governments and African Union to urgently intervene on to the deteriorating political situation in the Horn of African country and adopt appropriate responses. Since then, the political situation in Eritrea is nearing catastrophic proportions, driving thousands of young people out of their country. Thousands of Eritreans are perishing on a daily basis in the Sahara desert and in the Mediterranean Sea as they flee the brutal regime in the country.

It is highly worrying that African leaders and the African Union have not taken any substantial measures to address and respond to the growing humanitarian crisis in the country, which has spilled over to neighbouring countries and beyond. The UNHRC COI has characterised the crisis in Eritrea constituting crimes against humanity, and that it is threatening regional and international peace and security.

We once again call on the African Union to put the human rights situation in Eritrea on its agenda for the forthcoming Summit in South Africa. Let us learn from our recent experiences in Rwanda, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and recently Mali and Burundi where violence and human rights abuses led to crises of unimaginable proportions.

African lives indeed matter!!

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