

## **The Ethio-Norway Forced Repatriation in Prospect**

By Samson Seifu

In my previous article entitled ‘‘The Ethio-Norway Forced Repatriation Agreement in Retrospect’’ published on 13 February 2012 on different websites, I presented the background and the events which led to the signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). In this article the events after the announcement and the prospects afterwards with focus on the plights of the stakeholders (the rejected asylum seekers from Ethiopia who have been living in Norway for many years, from 3-20 years) are presented as follows:

The Norwegian Immigration Directorate (UDI) and The Norwegian Ministry of Justice issued a press statement on their respective homepage on 26 January 2012 about the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Royal Government of Norway and the ‘‘Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia’’. The MoU was signed with immediate effect in Addis Ababa on the same date, i.e. 26 January 2012.

The next day on 27 January 2012 the two above mentioned government offices jointly called for an information meeting to be held on 27 January 2012 at 15:00 hrs. at the immigration directorate’s head office in Oslo via e-mail messages intended to reach the Ethiopian diaspora in Oslo. As a deputy chairman of the Ethiopian Community in Norway, I happened to receive the e-mail that apologizes if UDI has sent the message outside the target group and requested to forward it to other acquaintances who may be interested in it.

The Ethiopian opposition camp having partly attended in bewilderment the information meeting, unanimously decided to walk out of the meeting hall in protest of the signed forced repatriation agreement with one of the world’s worst dictatorial regime. During the brief moment of the information meeting, I had also the chance to express my view about the repatriation agreement. After having introduced myself as the deputy chairman of the Ethiopian Community in Norway and an active member of the Ethiopian Common Forum in Norway, I went on to share the audience my concern about the plight of the rejected asylum seekers from Ethiopia who have been politically active for years with the opposition and the fact that they have been under surveillance by pro-regime operatives in Norway would automatically put their lives in danger. I delivered two CDs to the representatives from the justice department. The CDs contain the activities of the pro-government operatives in Norway in a meeting they held in Oslo in connection with the dictator’s visit for the energy conference held in Oslo in October 2011.

Though the envisaged information meeting failed to attract the good will of the Ethiopian diaspora in Oslo, the government anyway continued with the implementation of the first phase of the MoU by distributing an information letter to all asylum seekers from Ethiopia in their respective localities urging them to contact the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to proceed with the offered package for voluntary return.

It is a very well known fact that the Norwegian government has been longing for two decades to achieve the possibility of returning by force rejected Ethiopian asylum seekers to Ethiopia.

In what the Norwegian authorities call “assisted voluntary return”, they have offered a window of opportunity that lasts up to March 15, 2012. The mind boggling question is what then after the set deadline?

What is special and unique about this group of people is that they have been living in Norway for many years, many of them established families and worked legally paying taxes until last year (January 2011) where the government shutdown the mechanisms for working possibilities. Many of these rejected asylum seekers have been politically active both at the leadership and grass roots level thanks to the conducive environment in Norway and the presence of actively functioning diaspora political organizations in Norway.

The objective reality in the present day Ethiopia; however, is an atmosphere of fear and hopelessness for peoples of differing political views than the ruling minority government of the TPLF. What await these people if returned by force are all forms of inhuman treatment including arbitrary detention, torture and in the worst case scenario murder as there are well-documented evidences compiled by the regime’s informants who are active in Norway. The information the informants collect are processed and stored for life by the regime’s National Security and Intelligence Services (NISS) labeling them as enemies of the regime. Such information are particularly very useful at times of crisis as is witnessed after the 2005 national election result controversies where tens of thousands of opposition activists and supporters were picked from their homes and received all sorts of punishments.

The two links below offer a brief account of the infamous Ethiopian National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) by Ethiopia expert, German national Mr. Gunther Shroder which was presented on April 5, 2011 in Oslo conference.

- 1) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ur-4hm0MnGE&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ur-4hm0MnGE&feature=player_embedded)
- 2) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slqFRa\\_BeTo&feature=related](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slqFRa_BeTo&feature=related)

The dictatorial regime of Meles Zenawi is well known for its gross human rights violations and repressions of citizens. Independent international institutions such as Amnesty International (AI), Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the United States Department of State have documented and confirmed the gross human rights violations the regime commits against citizens in Ethiopia

The Norwegian Organization for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) is one of the first who strongly reacted and denounced the signed forced repatriation agreement on a press release posted on its own homepage. Also NOAS’s general secretary, Mrs. Ann-Magritt Austenå, in her commentary on one of the biggest newspapers in Norway (Dagsavisen) notwithstanding generally the very essence of returning rejected asylum seekers to their country of origin, warned against the dangers and consequences of experimenting with authoritarian regimes like the one in Ethiopia.

NOAS together with other Norwegian organizations are trying one last desperate attempt doing all they can to the best of their capacity to help reorganize the asylum seekers' supportive documents for review of their cases by the aliens appeal board (UNE).

On the other hand, as the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2012 deadline approaches, the Task Force against Forced Repatriation and the Association of Ethiopian Asylum Seekers in Norway are intensifying their all rounded and multi-faceted campaigns with the objective of bringing their concerns and anxiety to the attention of the Norwegian public and government in particular and the world community in general.

This is really a trying moment for the rejected asylum seekers who have been critical opponents of the Meles regime for years and who have no other option than facing what is going to happen after the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2012.

This is a moment which the Ethiopian Diaspora all over the world needs to give a special attention and due response.