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LETTER TO ALL IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES

THE RIGHT OF ASYLUM SEEKING ETHIOPIAN REFUGEES
MUST BE RESPECTED

SOCEPP has learnt of the alarming development that quite a few countries have denied Ethiopian refugees asylum rights on grounds that are actually flimsy and without factual basis.

1. One argument to justify the denial is the allegation that Ethiopia is a safe country meaning there is little or no political persecution and repression and the claim of refugees is not justified.
2. Another reason, this time given by the US Homeland Security, is that refugees who had one time or another in the past taken part in armed struggle against the former totalitarian pro Soviet regime of colonel Mengistu can be classified as "terrorists" or "having belonged to a terrorist organization".

Let us first of all mention the glaring fact that the USA and European countries have been giving asylum rights to Ethiopians who were involved in the infamous Red Terror as torturers, killers or as officials ordering the massive repression. SOCEPP can present the lists of such people that have been given asylum rights, including names of those involved in massacres (Arbagugu, Eastern Wellega, Bedeno, Asebot, etc) as officials of the present regime and who are enjoying asylum and have even become American citizens

for one. Hence, the untenable double standards that works against the rights of present asylum seekers.

The assertion that the regime in Ethiopia is not repressive and that those who flee from the country do not deserve refugee status goes totally against the reality. The attempt to return bona fide refugees in the Sudan using this assertion as fact has been rebuked and rejected in the past. The deplorable human rights situation in Ethiopia has been denounced by local and international human rights organizations. The existence of organizations given legal recognition by the regime does not invalidate the fact that many others are banned and their members hounded and repressed. Dozens of leaders and members of the opposition Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party have been disappeared and no detained member of this party has ever been brought before a court of law since 1991. Membership in the EPRP, the OLF, the ONLF, the EPPF, etc brings full repression. Members of the independent press and media have been forced out of the country, vast security and repressive apparatus is in place all over the country and the politics of ethnic discrimination makes many from non Tigrean ethnic background possible victims. Massacres in Gambella, the Ogaden etc are not anomalies but symptoms of a thoroughly repressive and practically totalitarian regime.

SOCEPP knows that real politics dictates the judgment of the host countries as the regime in Addis Abeba is part of the anti terror coalition/alliance and pays lip service to democracy and human rights through its lobbyists. But, human rights cannot and should not be sacrificed for debatable political gains. Deported Ethiopian refugees from the Sudan, Kenya and Djibouti have been disappeared (like Azanaw Demile from the Sudan, Moges from Djibouti, Abera Chome from Kenya, etc..), tortured (like the Air Force officers who landed their jet fighter in Djibouti and were sent back), or even killed (like the elderly Major Atanaw Wassie who was deported with 14 others from the Sudan and died in prison from lack of adequate medical care). The Meles regime is actually one of the worst human rights violators in Africa and the massacre of some 200 people during the 2005 election has highlighted this. The denial of asylum to deserving and persecuted Ethiopians is thus a travesty of justice especially if the denial is backed by a wrong

conclusion that asserts the regime respects human rights and does not engage in political repression (there are some 35,000 political prisoners all over Ethiopia and a network of secret prisons exists in Addis Abeba and other towns).

The argument by the US authorities that those who had at one time taken part in armed struggle against the former regime can be classified as members of terrorist organizations defies all logic. By this argument, then the groups in power and in Addis Abeba are both terrorists. This argument is the same one that designated the South African ANC as terrorist and led to the blunder of denying Nelson Mandela a visa to the United States! The struggle against the ruthless and totalitarian regime of colonel Mengistu necessitated taking up arms and it was the USA itself that was backing some of the forces like now ruling TPLF, EPLF and EPDA to wage such a struggle. The justified struggle against a cruel and inhuman regime cannot, by any definition, be labelled terrorist and hence the assertion by the US Homeland Security is quite erroneous. And even if the debatable argument is made by the authorities that armed struggle waged against the present regime by groups such as the ONLF and OLF, for example, can be classified as terrorist the Homeland refusal of asylum rights and Green Cards involves many who are members of organizations such as the EPRP which is not waging armed struggle at the present time.

This is why SOCEPP calls on the USA and European countries like Britain, Norway, etc to redress the situation and to correctly and humanely reply to the asylum demands by Ethiopian refugees.

Injustice anywhere is Injustice Everywhere!

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<p>INJUSTICE ANYWHERE IS INJUSTICE EVERYWHERE SOCEPP, POSTFACH 51213, BERLIN 13372, GERMANY SOCEPP, 30 RIGA COVE, WINNIPEG, MB R2P 2Z7, CANADA E MAIL: SOCEPP @AOL.COM WEB SITE: WWW.SOCEPP.DE</p>
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