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CECCO

Coalition des communautés et organisations érythréennes du Canada
Coalition of Eritrean Canadian Communities and Organizations

Press Release

May 29, 2013

Canada Should Respect Our Dual Citizenship Rights

CECCO is disappointed with the decision of the Department of Foreign Affairs to expel the Eritrean Consul to Canada, Mr. Semere Ghebremariam O'Micael. This unnecessary escalation in the relationship between Canada and Eritrea is unfortunate. If indeed such acts of extortion are alleged to have occurred we would expect the RCMP to investigate and release their findings to the public.

The 2% tax levied on Eritrean citizens living abroad emerged during the Eritrean Referendum process and was inspired by the Eritrean community in Diaspora. This was put into law in Eritrea under 2% Tax Form Proclamation No 17/1991 & 67/1995ⁱ. Our dual citizenship rights guaranteed to us under Canadian law is something we value. As a citizen of Eritrea you are entitled to land, inheritance, you can enter and leave the country without a visa, you have a right to vote, and a responsibility to pay 2% of your income to the Eritrean government.

CECCO contacted a source at the Eritrean Consulate in Toronto today who said that there are at least approximately 30,000 Eritreans living in Canada; however only 2,000 Eritrean-Canadians are known to pay their 2% tax. The source also said that the "internal document" cited by the National Post and the CBC, was in fact a document provided to the Department of Foreign Affairs by the Eritrean Consul to show that Eritreans were only receiving information on how to make their payments. CECCO has seen the document and could not locate any reference to the military or defense fund as was alleged. It simply appears to be a document providing Eritrean-Canadians the option of paying the tax in Eritrea or through a German bank.

Our communities have never received reports of harassment or extortion by the

Eritrean Consulate in Toronto. If these accounts of extortion were true, we would imagine that these issues would not have surfaced 22 years since the law was passed in Eritrea. We are under the impression that the 2% tax is an optional voluntary contribution by those who require any services that are entitled to Eritrean citizens.

The individuals making allegations of extortion and describing our community as living in fear have been actively working against our communities for the past couple of years and are highly politicized individuals who have no interest in laying their roots in Canada. They have imported their political fight from Eritrea to Canada. The Eritrean-Canadian community should not be used as a scapegoat to further the political interests of a few individuals.

The Canadian press should not follow the unjust practice of selective interviewing and reporting unverified accusations, nor should the Department of Foreign Affairs rely solely upon these biased sources.

CECCO calls upon the Canadian government to protect our rights of dual citizenship granted to us under the Citizenship Law in Canadaⁱⁱ. Should we be disallowed from voluntarily paying our 2% tax, it effectively denies us our right to exercise our Eritrean citizenship rights.

Background:

CECCO is an organization that represents the following communities across Canada, The Eritrean Canadian Association of Ontario, The Eritrean Canadian Community of the Prairie Inc., The Eritrean Cultural & Civic Centre of Calgary, The Eritrean Community Cultural Centre of London, The Eritrean Community in Quebec, The Eritrean Community in Winnipeg Inc., and The Eritrean Cultural Centre of Greater Vancouver.

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ⁱ http://www.embassyeritrea.org/consular/PDF-docs/mehwey_gibri_2012.pdf

ⁱⁱ <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/dual-citizenship.asp>