



**Permanent Mission of The State of Eritrea  
To the United Nations, New York**

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**Statement by H.E. Mr. Araya Desta  
Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations**

**On agenda item 69 (b,c): Promotion and Protection of Human Rights during  
the Interactive Dialogue of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human  
Rights in Eritrea, Ms. Sheila B. Keetharuth**

**At the Third Committee of the 68th Session of the  
United Nations General Assembly**

**New York, 24 October 2013**

Mr. Chairman,

For over a half a century the Eritrean people have been at the forefront of the struggle for dignity and basic human rights. Eritrea as a nation that rose from the ashes of war has been engaged in the past two decades in healing the wounds of war, ensuring peace and security, accelerating the development agenda and preserving the dignity of its people, through;

1. Addressing the social, economic, political and cultural challenges that face a newly-independent young nation. As a result of the collective efforts of the different sectors of society, Eritrea is on track to achieve the goals related to gender equality in primary education, child health, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases. Let me quote from the recent report of UNICEF which supports some of these facts: "Despite the obstacles of poverty, war and drought, the lives of girls and boys in today's Eritrea are measurably better than those of the precious generations of children. More of them survive, fewer suffer from debilitating diseases, more go to school and more are protected from violence, abuse and neglect".
2. Ensuring good governance and full participation of all Eritreans in public life. The government has been enacting laws and building its human capital. Recently, new legislative measures were introduced by the Ministry of Justice; and elections of magistrates were also held in some districts to promote the rule of law and ensure governance.
3. Engaging in an active and constructive dialogue with partners, including on human rights issues. Eritrea is actively engaged with the Human Rights Council, including under the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism. It is working on the implementation of the recommendations it accepted in the first UPR cycle, and is scheduled for early 2014 to be reviewed by the Human Rights Council. Eritrea has also began engagement with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and hopes to receive a technical team to explore areas of cooperation for the consolidation of human rights in Eritrea. We are also active participants in the African mechanisms for people's and human rights as well as the Cotonou Agreement that underpins ACP-EU partnership.

Today, after two decades of independence and despite relentless hostilities to undermine our sovereignty, Eritrea has made strides in the promotion and protection of the rights of its citizens. We are cognizant of the fact that there are challenges and gaps in addressing human rights issues like in many other countries. However, Eritrea doesn't take its obligations lightly in the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Mr. Chairman,

Eritrea objects human rights issues to be used as a tool of political pressure. As it has clarified on several meetings with the Special Rapporteur, including one that we had yesterday, Eritrea finds it difficult to accept a mandate that is evidently designed for political purposes. The crux of the matter is that this mandate was not created with human rights objectives at its core.

Mr. Chairman, let me stress that:

- There is no human rights situation in Eritrea that calls for the attention of the Human Rights Council, or for an interactive dialogue with the Third Committee;
- It was pushed and adopted while Eritrea is engaged in the UPR process and preparing its report for the Second Cycle. If genuine, those concerns could have been addressed during the dialogue with Eritrean delegation when it presents its UPR report;
- It was spearheaded by the same countries that are holding hostage the entire population of my country not only in a state of "no war no peace" situation, but also by imposing unfair and unjust sanctions. We note with serious concern the continuous attempt to prevent and discourage Eritreans in the Diaspora from making remittances and other financial contributions to the development of their homeland and the active campaign also to give the management and control of the revenues of the mining sector of my country to a third party. So how do the two reconcile? What is the motive of expressing concern for human rights situation while doing everything possible to deny the people of my country from enjoying their hard won peace and the unfettered access to the fruits of their natural resources?

Human rights ideals cannot be promoted by finger pointing and confrontation as demonstrated by the fate of the Human Rights Commission that ended as a discredited institution in 2006.

Mr. Chairman,

I listened carefully to the statement made by the Rapporteur. I reject the image she tried to portray of my country. Allow me Mr. Chairman to briefly outline why the contents of her presentations fall far short of that of an "independent, impartial and objective expert" by

- presenting allegations as facts;
- exaggerating and misrepresenting the situation on the ground;
- collecting information by visiting certain states that have bilateral issues with my country;
- relying heavily on sources that have grinds to ax against the government of Eritrea while studiously avoiding views and perspectives of many Eritrean communities and associations;
- dismissing the prevailing "no war no peace" situation as having no impact on the full enjoyment of the people;
- underrating the remarkable achievements of MDGs made by Eritrea; and by
- not reflecting information provided to her from her contacts with Eritrean officials in several places.

Mr. Chairman

Let me now address some of the substantive issues raised by the Rapporteur:

**On national service:** As citizens of a small nation, Eritrean citizens have the shared duty to defend and protect the sovereignty and political independence of the country. By the end of 2005, the Government demobilized 105 thousand National Service members with financial support from World Bank, European Union and other multilateral and bilateral partners. Moreover, the national service has evolved over the years. The youth, aged 18 and above, are not required to stay in an over extended military service. Instead, they are accorded with wider educational opportunities in line with the policy of the government wherein more emphasis is placed on the development of the nation's human capital. Sawa, which started as a national service training facility, has long been transformed to an academic and vocational training center. The youth after completing the last year of high school in Sawa, depending on their academic performance, either pursue a degree college program, a two year diploma courses or one year certificate training.

After graduation the students are assigned to line ministries, including the ministry of Education where there is a huge demand for teachers. The challenge Eritrea continues to face is, however, its inability to pay salaries commensurate with the rising cost of living. The low pay is not limited to the youth under national service, but to the wider public employees. The government periodically takes a variety of measures to mitigate the financial burden on the service women and servicemen. Recently, the government has launched various schemes and stop-gap measures until the overall situation is reverted to normalcy.

Last but not least, the Eritrean law that prohibits citizens under the age of 18 from serving in the armed services is strictly adhered to.

**On illegal crossing of the border:** Crossing the border illegally is certainly an offense, but there is categorically no "shoot to kill policy". Such willful and baseless accusations only discredit those who make them. When apprehended, first time offenders are kept in detention that has now been reduced to three months. As detainees, their rights are respected, and contrary to politically motivated accusations, they are not subjected to torture.

**On returnees:** Eritrea maintains a policy of voluntary repatriation of its nationals wherever they may be. And it opposes any forced repatriation or expulsions. Eritreans who are repatriated face no persecution and are encouraged and assisted to reintegrate to their respective families and societies. The most recent returnees from Israel could be cited as an example of the policy of the government on this matter.

**Freedom of expression:** The public media is open to all to express their views on issues of their interest and concerns. Access to various sources of information, including to internet, social media and satellite dishes are also visibly present and available, irrespective of their political contents.

**Freedom of conscience and religion:** Every person has an established and legally protected freedom of conscience and religion. There is clear separation of state and religion and all people of different religious faiths have been living in harmony side by side for centuries.

**Extrajudicial killings:** There are no extrajudicial killings or executions; and the de-facto moratorium on the death penalty remains in effect.

Mr. Chairman,

It would be remiss on my side if I did not address the tragedy of Lampedusa that claimed the lives of many Eritreans. Unfortunately, the Special Rapporteur has disrespectfully misinterpreted and attempted to politicize the tragedy, while the whole country and their families are mourning). The Eritrean government has been calling on the international community to investigate and put an end to the transnational crimes by bringing the criminals to justice; but to no avail. Eritrea welcomes the recent African Union decision to investigate the matter. The incident underscores, unless countries of origin, transit and destination work together, trafficking in persons and their enablers will continue to take advantage of the vulnerabilities of migrants and our ability to prevent human tragedies will be undermined.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation wishes to stress that the notion of an effective multilateral system could only be realized, if it is based on unambiguous and transparent rules that apply to all players without selectivity, politicization and double standards.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.