

## **J' Accuse Human Rights Watch**

*Letter to Mr. Kenneth Roth (Executive Director of HRW)*

### ***I - WORLD REPORT ERITREA***

Dear Mr. Roth,

Reading your latest annual report on Eritrea (2014), at first, I strongly doubted it was even my country. But, unfortunately, it was my homeland you were writing about.

I would be really pleased if you could help me understand a few passages.

First, I was wondering whether by putting the logo of *Bisha's gold mine* at the centre of Eritrea's map corresponded with an inexplicit message to point out the country's natural resources or just to make the report more appealing to the reader?

Secondly, you compile your report with a heavy load of *according to, reported by, it said, it told, he describes*, etc. It also seems appropriate to mention that Human Rights Watch does not operate within Eritrea, neither it acquires reliable information from inside the country. So HRW continues, through its reports, to spread unconfirmed stories and fabrications.

The report states: "*Eritrea is among the most closed countries in the world; human rights conditions remain dismal. Indefinite military service, torture, arbitrary detention, and severe restrictions on freedoms of expression, association, and religion provoke thousands of Eritreans to flee the country each month.*"

Young Eritreans are fleeing their country. That is true. They run away for extended military service, this is also true. But why does the report fail to rightly address Ethiopia's incomppliance with the EEBC final and binding decisions, Ethiopia's continuing illegal occupation of Eritrean territories? Is Human Rights Watch aware of the *no war – no peace* situation persisting since the end of the conflict in 2000 and that forces everyone to stay alert?

Given our history, which has taught us in the most terrible way how this world and politics work, you should already understand that any genuine, patriotic, and conscious Eritrean would just never naively accept incorrect reports by the UN's Special Rapporteur on Eritrea.

The UN unlawful decisions have negatively affected the course of Eritrean history. It started in 1952, with the federation of Eritrea to Ethiopia and the total annexation ten years later by Emperor HaileSellasie. During the thirty-year struggle for freedom more than 100.000 Eritreans sacrificed their lives during which the UN only watched silently

and it was only because of their ultimate sacrifice that we have been able to become a Nation!

So Mr. Roth, I wonder where the UN was when Eritreans were getting killed by the regimes of HaileSellasie and MengistuHailemariam? Was the UN not aware of the Red Terror Campaign? Was the UN not aware of the Napalm bombs used to kill innocent civilians? Why wasn't a "Special Rapporteur" of the UN on Eritrea constituted during these bloody years?

*"Eritrea has no constitution, functioning legislature, independent judiciary, elections, independent press, or nongovernmental organizations; it does not hold elections."*

We have been strongly demonized for not welcoming foreign NGOs, although they seem to have become a way of western control in Africa. Like many other Eritreans, I believe in the principle of self-reliance and a way for me to proudly-and-rightly contribute to the development of my nation is by paying the two percent tax.

*"Children as young as 15 are inducted and sent for military training, according to recent interviews by refugee agencies."*

This statement is utterly false. In Eritrea every child has to go school and their main concern age would be about their homework, semester exams and probably falling in love with his/her classmate. The military training only starts at the completion of the secondary school.

*"Some prisoners are offered release on condition that they sign statements renouncing their faith. Three deaths during captivity were reported by foreign based religious monitoring groups in 2013, but given the difficulties of obtaining information, the number may be higher."*

Or maybe even lower?

In my country, from thousands of years, Christians and Muslims have co-existed in peaceful harmony and total respect of each other's faith. Islam and Christianity are both secular religions that have become part of the Eritrean history and culture. Having said that, Eritreans remain conscious about those western-driven religions, which aim at controlling and dividing populations. In Eritrea, it is the established religions, especially the Orthodox Church, that have been targeted by Christian fundamentalist groups from the West.

*"Eritrea has been under United Nations sanctions since 2009 because of its support for armed Islamic insurgents in Somalia and its refusal to release Djibouti prisoners of war captured during a 2008 invasion of Djibouti's border territory."*

Supposedly, Human Right Watch should act as a neutral observer but the biases are quite obvious. Nothing could be more false than linking Eritrea with warlords in Somalia, invasion of Djibouti's territory – all started as Ethiopia's propaganda and proved to be totally unfounded. Moreover, the Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council resolution 2111 (2013) -13 October 2014- boldly states: "*The Monitoring Group has found no evidence of Eritrean support to Al-Shabaab during the course of its present mandate.*"

Similarly, the recent UN sanctions have been unjustly imposed on the Eritrean people by the US pressure, eternal ally of Ethiopia since the times of Emperor HaileSellassie.

Blatant was the take of US when Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, in 1952, openly declared: "*From the point of view of justice, the opinion of the Eritrean people must receive consideration. Nevertheless, the strategic interests of the United States in the Red Sea Basin and world peace make it necessary that the Country (Eritrea) be linked with our ally Ethiopia.*"

In my opinion dear Mr. Roth, your reports on Eritrea also seem to carry on such legacy.

Below some few examples of Human Rights Watch's curriculum.

1) IRAQ: in your article ***Indict Saddam*** published on Wall St. Journal (Mar. 22, 2002) you conclude saying: "*That delegitimization would not guarantee his ouster, but it would certainly help build consensus that he is unfit to govern, and thus that something must be done to end his rule.*"

By now, everyone knows what has later happened to Saddam Hussein and the cycle of chaos and instability reigning in Iraq since the end of the 'rule'. I wonder what your opinion on 'human rights' after Saddam is and whether you believe Iraqis have been better off since US and UK intervention. How many people have died because of foreign intervention? Will Human Rights Watch ever denounce the crimes of Bush and Blair among others?

In the ***Briefing Paper*** (February 20, 2003) ***Section II: Weapons of Mass Destruction*** it was clear that Human Rights Watch believed on Iraqi's possession of weapon of mass destruction, as the report stated: "*No party to a conflict in Iraq would be legally justified in using any weapon of mass destruction under any circumstances. Given that a stated rationale for a potential attack on Iraq is the desire to remove any threat from weapons of mass destruction (WMD), there are two issues that are of particular concern. The first is a deliberate use of WMD by Iraqi forces against invading coalition forces or as an act of vengeance against Iraqi civilians. The Iraqi government might also use conventional weapons to commit mass atrocities against Iraqis.(...) Similarly, any use of biological*

*weapons by either party to the conflict would violate international law. The 1975 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) prohibits the development, production, acquisition, and stockpiling of biological weapons.”*

Did Human Rights Watch ever explain that these weapons were never found? Has HRW ever taken responsibility for the consequences of its sinister fabrications? Has HRW ever apologized to anyone?

2) SYRIA: the Syrian uprising started on spring 2011 and **World Report 2011 on Syria (Events of 2010)** reports: *“There was no significant change in Syrian human rights policy and practice in 2010. Authorities continued to broadly violate the civil and political rights of citizens, arresting political and human rights activists, censoring websites, detaining bloggers, and imposing travel bans. (...) The international community's interactions with Syria have focused almost exclusively on its regional role. Key European Union and US officials have condemned the arrest and trials of prominent activists, but their interventions have had no impact on Syria's actions.”*

Does Human Rights Watch consider the atrocities of war in Syria being the reason of the situation of earlier years? Is HRW satisfied with today's human rights situation?

3) LIBYA: the protests in Benghazi began Tuesday the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2011 and about a year earlier, the **World Report 2011 on Libya (Events of 2010)** reads as follows: *“Libya has no independent NGOs and Libyan laws severely restrict freedom of association. (...) in June Libya ordered UNHCR to close its office and expelled its representative (...)”*

Ten days since the beginning of the uprising, 63 Organizations around the World signed a Petition to the General Assembly as reported by Peggy Hicks, global advocacy director at Human Rights Watch. She reported the words of Jose Luis Diaz, Head of Office and Representative at the UN for Amnesty International: *“Allowing Libya to continue to serve on the Human Rights Council today would be an affront to those suffering in Libya and to human rights defenders across the globe who are demanding Libya's suspension.”*

So, again I ask: is Human Rights Watch satisfied with the human rights situation in Libya since the defeat of MuammarGadhafi? Has the country's human rights situation gotten any better?

4) SUDAN: before the Sudan was split, the report: **Sudan, Oil, and Human Rights** (November 25, 2003) Human Rights Watch advices all oil companies to suspend their activities in Sudan. *“None of these nor any oil company, including TotalFinaElf, nor industry contractors and subcontractors, should resume or commence operations in Sudan unless(...)”*

Below other two recommendation, the first was addressed to the Government of Sudan: *“Adhere in full to the IMF Code of Good Practices on Fiscal Transparency and publish a detailed account of military expenditures and the source of such revenue under IMF guidance (...)”*

The second was addressed to the US: *“Condemn abuses by all parties to the conflict-including the Sudanese government armed forces and its ethnic militias, SSDF, Baggara militias, Popular Defence Force, SPLM/A, and others-and insist that those responsible for abuses be held accountable. Continue existing sanctions on Sudan until concrete and measurable progress has been made toward ceasing human rights abuses.”*

I wonder why would Human Rights Watch consider the US a crucial party to be involved in the affairs of Sudan? Can the US even be regarded as a benign guardian or fair mentor lecturing other countries about human rights standards?

Again, is HRW satisfied with the human rights situation of Sudanese people today?

## **II - BACK TO ERITREA**

Here are the contents of the report *Eritrea: Mining Investors Risk Use of Forced Labor* on the gold found in Eritrea (15 January 2013). It reads: *“Hear No Evil: Forced Labor and Corporate Responsibility in Eritrea’s Mining Sector,” describes how mining companies working in Eritrea risk involvement with the government’s widespread exploitation of forced labor (...) “If mining companies are going to work in Eritrea, they need to make absolutely sure that their operations don’t rely on forced labor,” said Chris Albin-Lackey, business and human rights researcher and senior Human Rights Watch.*

*“Based on the Bisha<sup>1</sup> experience the greatest risk of abuse may occur during the construction phase of these projects. (...) All mining firms working in Eritrea should undertake Human Rights(...) It is negligent for mining companies to ignore the risks of forced labor that clearly exist in Eritrea, (...)”*

In other words, HRW efforts can clearly be interpreted as another futile attempt to undermine Eritrea economically.

Already seven months before (June 20, 2012), in *US: Joint Letter Regarding US Engagement at Upcoming Human Rights Council Session*, Frank Jannuzi (Deputy Executive Director, Amnesty International USA) wrote a letter to Hillary Clinton (Secretary of State Department of the United States).

*“Dear Secretary Clinton: The joint statement on Eritrea signed by 44 countries at the March HRC<sup>2</sup> Session marked a positive step forward in drawing international attention to grave human rights violations in that country. The dire situation in Eritrea merits*

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<sup>1</sup> Bisha gold mine

<sup>2</sup> HRC Human Rights Council

*further attention from the Human Rights Council, and we call on the U.S. to work with partners to mobilize African leadership for a strong resolution at the June session that will establish a Special Rapporteur to report on the widespread and systematic human rights violations that have been continuing in Eritrea for over a decade. Sincerely yours... "*

Co-signatory Juliette de Rivero (Director of Human Rights Watch in Geneva).

It seems quite obvious that Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International are moving in perfect symbiosis.

In the report: *Ten Long Years* of September 24, 2011 HRW was recommending with the Government of Eritrea, writing: "Allow independent monitors such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and UN and African Commission special mechanisms access (such as the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment) to Eritrea's detention facilities." (...) "Human Rights Watch and other independent human rights entities, including the UN special Rapporteur on Eritrea, have documented serious patterns of human rights violations in Eritrea."

A judgment already written, it seems.

Finally, a recommendation to all countries of the world: "Abide by the guidance of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that particular categories of asylum seekers may be at risk upon return, in particular, persons avoiding military/national service; members of political opposition groups and Government critics; journalists; trade unionists; members of minority religious groups; members of certain minority ethnic groups; and victims of trafficking. Facilitate full access for UNHCR to Eritrean asylum seekers."

At the *Clinton Global Initiative* in 2009, President Obama declared: "I recently renewed sanctions on some of the worst abusers, including North Korea and Eritrea. We're partnering with groups that help women and children escape from the grip of their abusers. We are helping other countries step up their efforts and we have seen results."

And when Obama speaks of 'groups that help women and children escape' might he be alluding to the refugee camps in Ethiopia and Sudan? And what are these results of which he speaks of? Our young people running away?

"(...) Eritrean refugees have become a crucial source of information on the human rights situation in Eritrea given that Eritrea has not allowed United Nations special rapporteurs or other international human rights investigators to visit the country" states the latest report of Human Rights Watch dated 26 September 2014, although it does not sufficiently address on these *other international investigators*.

But young Eritreans also flee from the refugee camps in Ethiopia or Sudan. What happens there? HRW explains: "*Few Eritreans seek refuge in countries near Eritrea – including Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, and Sudan – because those countries force them to live in closed remote refugee camps, deny them access to work, or detain and abuse them in inhuman and degrading conditions*"

Almost justifying their journey through the desert and sea, which has led to a terrible number of deaths.

I wonder how many of those drowned in the Mediterranean Sea does HRW feel on its conscience. How many of those who vanished in the desert did HRW actually meet and did question? How many of them did HRW deceive with a false pretense of humanitarian reception in refugee camps? Did HRW really listen to their voices, catch the hopes painted in their eyes? Does HRW consider the voices of all Eritrean migrants including those who did not lament of a ‘dictatorship’ in Eritrea? Probably not.

"Cui prodest?" said the Latins. The Exodus helps neither Eritrea nor its President. So who would be more interested in ripping Eritrea of its young people than the United States and Ethiopia? Human Rights Watch too?

Dear Mr. Roth, as Human Rights Watch wrote: "*The Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on June 27 to establish the Commission of Inquiry to investigate human rights violations in Eritrea “since independence” in 1991*" clearly stating that abuses have been a recurring factor in Eritrea since liberation. Was the situation during the Ethiopian annexation regime of Colonel MengistuHailemariam and before harmonious?

*The one charm about the past is that it is the past* – said Oscar Wilde.

Dear Mr. Roth, are you truly committed in protecting the human rights of Eritrean citizens?

If so, as an Eritrean citizen I ask you and HRW to understand that since the 1950s the very first human right has been denied to us: the right to peace. I challenge you to help us assure peace, the respect of Eritrea’s sovereignty and guarantee that our borders are finally respected.

The right to peace should be the root and the mother of all human rights. To deprive a nation of this fundamental right is, for me, to deprive it of its very right to exist.

Eritrea is a country that has continuously committed to development through its own efforts and without the usual borrowing from legalized loan sharks, that has made incredible progress in the achievement of almost all eight **Millennium Development Goals** (according to UNDP, Eritrea is among the only four countries in Africa to succeed), ensuring a long-term solution to water shortage through the construction of several dams – which has also served to guarantee food security. Dams are used to retain

water, without water there would be no food, and that would highly compromise the well-being of this and future generations.

So again I ask: can a country like Eritrea, which has consistently shown its commitment to social welfare and development, instead be accused of depriving its citizens of *fundamental human rights*?

It is with noble ideals of serving future generation on long-term commitment that the Eritrean People build their country from scratch today. How can HRW just belittle the efforts of Eritreans by labeling it 'forced labor'?

Is it plausible that a Country, which has uniquely managed to reduce infant and maternal mortality, eradicate malaria and extraordinarily reduce HIV rates, can be called "*Hell on Earth*"? Eritrea is also one of the few countries in the world that offers its students free education from kindergarten to College. A Country that in 2014 successfully involves students and teachers in projects to plant 4,000,000 trees to prevent desertification, a Country that cares for the well-being of **those who will come tomorrow** and for them today plants Eritrea's future trees. Is it credible that a Country that puts all this determination and care should be accused, tried and punished for serious crimes against its people?

I find these allegations to be very unreal and HRW attitude to perpetrate the crime of theft and deprivation of basic human rights to the Eritrean people. An injustice that, however, will not escape history books.

But it is never too late to repair and a letter can be an opportunity to encourage you with that. HRW should be on the side of Eritreans who are still fighting for justice. The solution to *all ills* has already been recognized and ruled on paper by the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) but, inexplicably, it was never respected nor implemented. Twelve long years have been wasted and that has served for some to provide their own distorted versions of history. Brush up on those records and you will find the whole truth printed in large letters, and it's simpler than HRW may believe.

Dear Mr. Roth, if you properly looked at our History, you would have discovered all the injustices that we have faced and still do. Since the days of our grandfathers, Eritreans were made Ascari of the Italians fighting in Libya, Somalia and Ethiopia, during which nearly one million Eritreans never returned home. Then we suffered other oppressors: English rule for 11 years and Ethiopian occupation for 40 years, which set off the thirty year-war for Liberation with more than 100,000 Eritreans killed. Again, thousands of youngsters were martyred because of the border war 1998-2000.

Today, those young Eritreans who are "tired" of the environment Eritrea was forcefully put into, end up drowning in the sea as it happened in the Tragedy of Lampedusa despite many human rights NGOs instead encourage them to leave. All while we Eritreans continue to suffer!



Mr. Roth, however you want to put it, we would always send up talking about the death of these Eritreans.

Therefore Mr. Roth, not only as an Eritrean citizen, but also as a global citizen, I launch my own *J'Accuse* to Human Rights Watch and to you as his lawful Representative.

*J'Accuse* Human Rights Watch to be part of the creative mind to foment the global chaos of our times, and that will continue time and time again, as in the past, to be used to justify more wars;

*J'Accuse* Human Rights Watch to be the one of best tools ever invented by the Western Powers to destabilize and promote new-colonization of Africa; and

*J'Accuse* Human Rights Watch to be who, in the name of human rights, is dictating laws around the World particularly focusing its attention on the African continent!

Expressing my inner disregard for such "humanitarian" job, hope you can live up to the day when there will be a new Era for Africa, the day of an African Renaissance, the day when there will be an International African Court of Justice to indict Human Rights Watch and similar "humanitarian" organizations for **crimes against humanity**.

And I hope that day will come very soon!

Yours sincerely,

Daniel WediKorbaria (*Eritrean artist*)