**Sheila B. Keetharuth Human rights issue or plain propagation?**

**By: Berhane Woldu.**

The UN Special reporter Sheila B. Keetharuth In her report wrongly stated human rights violations linked to the national service in Eritrea. The military services, fear of being targeted, low salary, assignment to civil administration, lack of freedom to decide their fate and counted it as human right violation.

From the outset one can discredit the report due to the unfair agenda driven methodology, lack of fairness or professional assessment. Sheila did not use valid and reliable instrument to conduct her interview. Even if one accepts her report on face value it does not hold water.

What is wrong with military services? Are there no other nations who have their civilian population trained as national army? My manager at Maryland State Government USA was a colonel in the reserve army and used to take leave from her regular work for training with the Army. Qatar one of the richest countries in the world is now calling its nationals for national service. It’s normal for Eritrea to have a national service.

Her arguments are naïve at the least she states; can’t decide their faith, low salary, the people fear of being targeted and assigned to civil administration. Eritrea is a growing nation and not yet well developed economically like the Western world it’s in no position to offer the choices and life style Sheila mentions. There are few private sector jobs available and foreign investment is in its infancy. There are foreign operated companies’ cases in point; Bisha mining company 90% percent of its employees are well paid Eritreans. Every graduate is granted a professional job at graduation unlike other countries where there is over 25% youth unemployment. Eritrea is one of the safest countries in the world where a blond hair can walk 3:00 AM anywhere he or she wants without fear.

There are many expatriates who have returned to Eritrea from USA, Europe, Asia and Africa. If there was fear of “targeted persons” would theses people chose to live in Eritrea. In Eritrea everyone, regardless where they reside, at the start of twelve’s grade goes to Sawa for matriculation and six month military training. Upon completing matriculation those who have scored greater than C- attend colleges. Young adults are given two choices on what major they want to complete their education; the higher your grade (A/B) the more likely to get your choices. Those who scored lower C-and D goes to two years vocational training; young adults who have lower score (D-) at matriculation are assigned to work in the different ministries. Those that are assigned to the Ministry of Defense are assigned to civilian duties and paid according to their pay scale in-addition are awarded annually food products which increases their pay scale.

Eritrea has professional army, navy, air force, Special Forces and many others. Eritrea also has national army that is constituted of its entire nationals. Every Eritrean male or female goes to a military training and Eritrean’s are all trained and ready to defend their national interest.

One needs to study the history of Eritrea. It’s a nation that achieved independence through the arm struggle of its civilian population which was inclusive of male, female, young and old. It should be of no surprise to anyone that Eritrea is a nation of five million (5,000,000) well trained army and it will continue as such because it is part and the essence of being an Eritrean.

Unlike what Sheila Rapporteur states; in Eritrea there are ample opportunities for people to work and have a meaningful life. I know quite a number of people who work for the Ministry of Education as teachers after completing their Bachelors degree. The salary that they are paid is minimal but unlike most young adults in the USA these graduates have no student loans; education is free. These teachers have second jobs; they teach on Saturdays, tutor children, work on weddings; as wedding decorators, camera men/women, photographers and limo drivers. They make sizable amount of money to supplement their incomes. I know quite a few who have earned enough money to buy cars. The Ministry of health employs’ a large number of graduates in different capacities; there are quite a large number who have second jobs working for quasi-private hospitals, or as pharmacy technicians for private pharmacies. The young adults work as barbers, electronics repairers, TV/dish arrangers, some work with private consulting firms and in sales. Banks offer profit sharing in addition to regular pay. The opportunities to make money are countless. An Eritrean who lives in Eritrea has a better life than a bellman in America or a goat herder in Israel.

Sheila Rapporteur needs to understand which rights matter most. Rights is based on law from real laws come real rights, from Imaginary laws fancied and invented by colonizers and self serving nations are invented rights. People have certain natural and irreversible rights; that all human have the rights to health, food, employment and equal distribution of national wealth. In Eritrea you have the right to free education, health and social services and you also have duties such as one year national service. Human rights groups who campaign against violations of political rights often ignored the economic and social rights which are the prerequisite for political rights.

In summation the UN human rights section should be ashamed in accepting such poorly prepared report.