

## **Campaigning to stop EU fund to Eritrea against the government or the Eritrean people?**

A politically motivated and inhumane campaigning is taking place in the UK as we speak. Some individuals, human rights organisations and media outlets are campaigning to the EU to stop the small but important fund to improve well-needed energy, health, education, training, and developing small enterprises in Eritrea. Why would any individual think that it is justifiable to campaign to stop supporting the above projects?

We Eritreans are the only people who can fix this confusion and make clear distinctions between politics and the interest of Eritrean society and communities. Most of the campaigners against Eritrean communities and the nation are satisfying their hungry stomach for political power or to refill their pockets with more money. Some of them might have a legitimate frustration against the Eritrean government however Eritrea is not just made of the Eritrean government, it is a nation with young people who are desperate for jobs, older people in need of more health and social care support and people with disabilities and mental health issues. What kind of Eritrean would not want those group of people supported inside their own country? Is the answer for everyone to leave the country and become a refugee in the west?

Another issue is the 2% voluntary contribution. I pay my full tax to the UK government with pleasure but I pay my 2% to my nation with passion. It is my choice and my promise to support my Eritrean people. No-one should dictate the other in how they should or shouldn't spend their money. It is a voluntary contribution and it is legal used to pay for services. As per my Eritrean brothers and sisters who are campaigning to stop the 2% or the small EU fund why do you want to stop it? To stop developmental projects going forward? To stop developing education and training? To stop supporting our people from having a better health? To not to give hope to the young people who are still working hard in Eritrea? To go against mothers and fathers who might need more health and social care support?

There is no way you can say that the Eritrean government is corrupt and the fund will be going to their pocket. For corruption is not in the history or the culture of the Eritrean government. They might have other challenges but they are clean from corruption.

I personally do not have a problem with opposing the Eritrean government. Anyone should be able to exercise their rights to differ. However, going to the UN and UK governments to stop funds to Eritrean people is against the nation not the government. I am sorry but to me you are putting your political and business interests before the interest of the Eritrean people and the Eritrean communities inside the country and in diaspora.

The current campaigning by Eritreans and non-Eritreans to stop the EU fund to Eritrea is selfish and the work of an enemy. Every Eritrean who agrees or disagrees with the Eritrean government should condemn those Eritreans and non-Eritrean individuals who are pushing UK MPs to read the ridiculous exaggerated statements about the situation in Eritrea and painting the country with horror stories with no evidence.

What is it you are trying to achieve?

If you are hoping to change the Eritrean government, please leave these issues to the Eritrean people. Do not underestimate the Eritrean people's power and intelligence. We are still the very same people who fought the cold war and the mighty Ethiopian army supported by the USA and USSR powers, are we not? Besides that, if you are interested in bringing about change this should be within the country by being involved in or supporting projects, investing or simply volunteering. No change comes from the outside. Change comes from inside and begging the EU and UK to stop supporting your own people is not acceptable at all.

I believe that the long term of this campaign might have even more sinister goals which are to weaken Eritrea both economically and politically, then call for Ethiopia to save it. The UN report by the Commission of Inquiry is one of the supporting evidences of this. To demonise Eritrea legally.

This is a dream which will never come to be true but nevertheless, it is a dream of our next door neighbour and knowingly or intentionally the campaigners are fulfilling the wish of our enemies.

We also should not ignore the media outlets and journalists who are copying and pasting articles without any evidence or balance of the truth of our country. Hence every Eritrean who cares about their nation and the Eritrean communities at home and abroad should write to their local MP and to the UK politicians to engage with Eritrea in a respectful, positive and meaningful manner.

I believe people make their country, not the government. Governments come and go Country and people remain. We, the Eritrean people, young and old, inside and outside made the EPLF and not the other way round. We won the military battlefield - we should now unite to win the economic and political battlefields. It is our choice what kind of nation we would like to see for ourselves and our next generation.

I am sure you agree with me that Eritrea is not alone in Africa faced with many challenges, including youth unemployment. However, the urgent need, in my opinion, is our unity and working together regardless of our different thinking.

In order to sort out our internal challenges I think we need to engage with each other in a much better way, perhaps by creating networks of different interest groups. We need to invest our time and money to create jobs in Eritrea and make sure the Eritrean government support us in doing so. We need to make sure that the Eritrean government is open for business. I am personally going to Eritrea to explore a potential business opportunity, supported by UK Trade and Investment. I will be very happy to share with you my findings in the New Year.

Our priority should be building our nation by being involved in business and social enterprise, trainings, education, trade, investment, agriculture, travel, tourism, technology and fishery.

In terms of external challenges it would be much more effective if we can demand justice united to lift the economic sanction. To put pressure on international communities to force Ethiopia to accept the final and binding border verdict by the ICC.

It is true we all wanted and expected faster development and prosperity. However, we are where we are and if we stand inside Eritrea and get out of Asmara to all directions we can see positive development taking place. For example, when I was young my village did not have a school, water pump or a village clinic but now my village has all three, including electric. Is this not positive change? The UNDP is active in supporting women in business and they are working very hard to engage with all local community development in the country. Surprise! Surprise! The UNDP in Eritrea is part of the UN who is trying to put the country down and I am not sure if they are communicating with each other.

Eritreans going backwards and blaming each other will not help us to move forward. Now is the time to act. Change is in the mind-set of the beholder. United, accountable and effectively responsible and connected individuals make the government. It is the responsibility of every Eritrean to make our nation the nation of great people. Please look at the bigger picture – don't become instrumental to take our country in the same way the West followed to change governments in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and now Syria and see the legacy they left in these countries.

Finally, I am not a politician and have no wish to become one. I am in business and love what I do but above all I care about my people and my nation from the bottom of my heart. I personally do not have any problem with difference of thoughts however to campaign to stop supporting the voluntary 2% contribution is unlawful and inhumane. Some people might be happy to pay traffickers to smuggle their brothers, sisters and extended families, including their old parents, this is their choice. However please do not forget that there are so many Eritreans in diaspora who are supporting and encouraging their younger cousins, nieces and brothers and sisters to hold on, to stay in their own land, to walk with their heads up and to build a nation and be proud of their achievements by telling them the truth of the West - the truth of becoming a refugee and asylum seeker. I have 11 cousins as members of the Eritrean national service and none of them are dead, none of them drowned in the Mediterranean Sea and none of them were tortured by traffickers. I will do everything I can to support them and Eritrea and for every young and old person to live in their own land. Soon, and very soon, these youngsters of Eritrea will lead this great nation and hold the light of our martyrs high above the mountains, the plain fields and the Red Sea of Eritrea.

The EU should be proud to support Eritrea to create job opportunities and help us to make use of our natural energy resources. I urge the EU to change their asylum policy on Eritreans and stop their wide open doors to drain our youth. No more political games please?. Young people are coming for a better life because the EU and US policy is suffocating Eritrea.

Awet n'hafash

Lasting Memory to our martyrs  
Eritrea will prevail very soon

Mebrak Ghebreweldi