

Once again, the Israeli newspapers are busy churning out stories about African migrants, and most recently have published several stories about Eritrean migrants who enter Israel illegally. There have been heart-wrenching stories about Eritrean women being abused by Bedouin and other traffickers, including Eritrean traffickers. Considering what is going on in the region today, why would the plight of Eritrean youth in the Sinai and elsewhere be so urgent that it would warrant such space and distribution today? Don't get me wrong, I am glad that they are doing so, but I am not convinced that their motives are altruistic. You cannot have a senseless and cruel official policy on the one hand, and then be shedding crocodile tears on the other.

These Eritreans, who are today languishing in Egyptian, Ethiopians, Israeli and Libyan detention centers and camps are victims of not just the smugglers and human traffickers, but also victims of Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, UNHCR and the various NED supported Eritrean "human rights" and "democracy" groups and their incessant defamation and vilification campaigns against Eritrea. I do hope that they can shoulder the moral and legal obligations that they now fully bear for the well being of these distressed refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. They were, after all, instrumental in getting them to where they are today-out of Eritrea and into the great and desperate dangers out there.

On the Egyptian side, there is a lot of misinformation going on and the status of the refugees is also misrepresented. The following report is from a Wikileaks cable on the issue of Eritreans and Ethiopians in Egypt:

"...UNHCR no longer has "automatic" access to potential refugees and asylum seekers. Al Attar stated that UNHCR sent 82 letters to the GOE on this situation without receiving a single response. The only group to which UNHCR was granted access was a group of 149 Eritreans and Ethiopians held in Aswan (reftel A). He said 118 Eritreans were determined to be refugees and were accepted by Canada. However, these refugees were still being held in Aswan as there was no agreement on the part of the GOE to release them..."

Why is the issue of Eritreans and Ethiopians handled differently? Is it because UNHCR cares more about Eritreans and Ethiopians? Of course not. UNHCR, Ethiopia and certain western nations do not want Eritrean youth to return to Eritrea. The reasons are obvious to everyone that has been following developments in the region. We have also read many reports about UN vehicles being used to traffic youth across the Eritrean border, and there are western diplomats who have paid traffickers on their behalf. We have seen how the US

Diversity Visa has been used to encourage youth to flee to neighboring countries and have read reports about US “diplomats” aiding and harboring Eritrean youth who cross the borders illegally.

When the Government of Eritrea used deterrent actions against those families that participated in the trafficking of their children, the western media, “human rights NGOs” and their mercenary Eritrean coteries went into another cyber spasm. A friend in Asmara told me that there were western Embassies who were willing to pay the fines in order to prove that families were being penalized. On the one hand they charge that Eritrea is not doing enough to stop the trafficking and when Eritrea takes actions, they cry foul. Eritrean Embassies in Egypt, Israel and Libya have been helping families locate their children, attend to the sick and homeless found, and identify and repatriate bodies as they are found. Eritrean Embassies and communities have had to bear the costs. Yet, today, the various anti-Eritrea “human rights” and “democracy” groups are distorting the truth and claiming that Eritrea is not concerned about these asylum and refugee claimants. The facts and the record are clear.

These youth find themselves in legal limbo and face detention in the various countries. According to the Wikileaks cables:

“...those caught by Egyptian police transiting the border who possess UNHCR identification will be imprisoned for one-year and released back to UNHCR. However, if the migrants possess no refugee documentation the GOE [Government of Egypt] will imprison them and then repatriate them to their home countries... the GOE is especially keen to make sure that those avoiding military service be sent back and not given asylum...”

For those who are caught just as they enter Israel, there is a new practice in place and it is known as “Hot Return”. This is the immediate return to Egypt of illegal persons who cross the Israeli border. It is currently in force along about a quarter of the Israel-Egypt border, over which virtually all illegal entrants enter Israel.

In Egypt they are either detained or returned to Eritrea...a practice the UNHCR and western NGOs vehemently disagree with. They would rather house them in god forsaken camps and weed out the ones that could be eligible for immigration to western capitals. Those who make it are then recruited as “human rights”, “democracy” activists to campaign against the people and government of Eritrea. Their “testimonies” become the staple for US State Department and other human rights reports which are cut and paste for maximum distribution. Someday, we will be able to see who they are and why they were picked for “salvation”.

At Cairo International Airport in early November 2009, as I made my way through immigration and security, I noticed two young Eritrean men who were being “handled” by Egyptian security forces. The security stayed with them and led them onto the final waiting area before boarding the flight that would take us all to Asmara, Eritrea. Considering how cold it was in Cairo that night, I first noticed that they did not have much clothing, just short sleeved T-shirts, pants and slippers on their feet. They both carried plastic bags which held the rest of their sparse belongings. Separated from the other passengers, their flight documents were being handled by the Egyptian security. On arrival at Asmara International Airport, when I inquired about them, I found out from one of the passengers on the flight, that they were voluntarily deported from Egypt.

I was in Eritrea when a group of about 400 people, Eritreans and Ethiopians who claimed to be Eritreans, were deported from Egypt. Amongst them were women and very young children who had narrowly escaped death. This tired batch had nothing to show for their ill-advised adventures except the psychological and physical scars that they will inevitably bear for sometime to come. They spoke about the loss of their meager resources dolled out to traffickers who were supposed to take them to greener pastures. Lured by the promise of a “better life” and not contemplating the dangers involved, they risked life and limb, only to be returned-alive if they were as lucky as this group was, and in body bags for those who were not.

Each one of them had a harrowing story to tell of their grueling journeys across the vast Sudanese desert into Egypt, aboard open bed pickups driven by non-descript smugglers who cared more about making money than the safety and wellbeing of those they caravanned into unknown faraway and hostile territories. They told stories of those who were unable to cough up more funds midway in their journey and were forced out, abandoned to face the harsh elements of nature. They spoke of their journey-mates who had vanished during the arduous trip, those who died of dehydration and of those who were left at the mercy of nature somewhere along the way. They told about how they were forced to face the uncertainties of life in countries where they were neither welcomed, nor allowed to remain in. They would remain the only tellers of the whereabouts of the many who simply vanished somewhere along the way, their bodies abandoned and buried in unmarked graves along the way, never to be found, let alone be repatriated.

Walking along Independence Avenue in Asmara, Eritrea’s capital, it is not unusual to find people standing in front of message boards reading death notices and funeral dates and times. Most of the announcements say “Merd’e”, but every now and then there are some that just say “Melqes”. The latter mostly mean that there are no bodies to bury and that there would only be mourning at the home of the deceased. When I enquired, I was told that most those whose announcements said “Melqes” were youth whose bodies were never recovered and whose deaths were told to the families by those who had survived the

harrowing journeys in boats across the Red Sea or through the Sahara desert. One told me that it was an agreement between the comrades, that if anything were to happen, the ones who survive would let their families know. It was promises they made to each other as they embarked on their journeys into the unknown. Tell my mother if...

Let's see what else happens to Eritrean youth that leave in search of paradise in European and American cities:

“...around 80 Eritrean asylum seekers who departed to claim asylum in Italy, perished in the sea. Only five of them survived to tell the tragedy. They floated on the deep seas for more than 20 days on 12-meter rubber boat yet no rescue...”

This story was reported in Malta and Italy as the two took pot shots at the other's "immigration policy". A diplomatic row between Italy and Malta played out in the press after an Italian cabinet minister described as 'undignified' a decision by Maltese authorities not to rescue the Eritrean while they were still at sea. According to the reports, Italian cabinet Minister Roberto Calderoli said that:

“...after intercepting the dinghy and after having supplied fuel for it, directed it towards Italian waters, instead of offering the rescue service that was rendered by us...”

In the meantime, there are 80 dead Eritreans...on just this one trip.

During each visit to Egypt (traveled there 4 times), I inquire about Eritreans in Egypt and is always saddened by the horrific stories of death and disillusionment that I hear and see. Between 2006 and 2009 over 2000 Eritreans were detained in Egypt. Over 100 were physically injured and many died. The Eritrean Community and the Embassy of Eritrea in Egypt carry the burden of the burial costs in Egypt. About 20 bodies were sent to Eritrea for burial at the families' request. There were about 50 unidentified bodies at the Egyptian morgue while I was there. Everyday, they threaten to discard those that are not claimed.

It is an ugly world out there and Elsa Chyrum, Selam Kidane and the other so called "human rights" and "religious rights" groups, sitting in the comfort of their homes in Western capitals have no clue as to the legal traps they are setting for these young men and women. These migrants enter Egypt "illegally" and are therefore considered as "criminals". Because Egypt and Israel are not the first countries that they came to after leaving Eritrea, they are not eligible for UNHCR support. But UNHCR and the various Eritrean groups also have made sure that they are not allowed to be sent back to Eritrea-where they say they will be "tortured", so they remain in legal limbo indefinitely. They become invisible, and

then they die. For some unlucky enough to find themselves facing an Israeli border guard, their journey comes to an abrupt end.

These anti-Eritrea groups who have been churning out reports about Eritrea write about a “shoot to kill policy”, without ever providing a single evidence of an Eritrean who has been shot when trying to illegally cross Eritrea’s borders. I know of some who have been captured while attempting to illegally cross the border and as in any country, appropriate punitive actions have been taken. Can they explain to us why Israel shot and killed Eritreans who tried to cross illegally cross their borders? Do they know any of the ones that have been killed? I do. Here are some of the Eritreans killed by Israeli security:

1. Kahsai G/Michael, his body was sent to Eritrea in 2007
2. Yemane Hisabu, his body was sent to Eritrea in 2007
3. Michael Legas Mesfin, his body was sent to Eritrea in 2009
4. Kiflom Gebregergish, his body was sent to Eritrea in 2009
5. Mulugeta Mebrahtu, buried at El Arish, Egypt-near the Gaza crossing
6. Hala Mhohammed Mahmoud, buried at Al Arish, Egypt
7. Adhanom Tadeos, buried at Aswan, Egypt

So, does Israel have a shoot to kill policy, or was Israel protecting her borders? For those who escape the border guards quickly find themselves in detention camps, if and when they make it across the Israeli border. Israel is not going to allow them to stay. On 28 November 2010 the Jerusalem Post article said that the Israeli cabinet had:

“...approved a plan to construct a detention center in the South to house African migrants who illegally cross into Israel from Egypt...The facility will provide basic shelter, food and medical services for the infiltrators until they leave the country...”

On 24 December 2010, the Jerusalem Post quoted the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as saying the following:

“...we do not intend to arrest refugees from war. We allow them to enter and will continue to do so. But we must stop the mass entry of illegal infiltrators who are looking for work, due to the very harsh repercussions that this wave will have on the character and future of the State of Israel...is threatening the jobs of Israelis, and it is threatening the Jewish and democratic character of the state of Israel...”

Wow! Yet, if Eritreans officials catch and detain those who attempted to illegally cross the Eritrean border, the western human rights groups send out the “alerts”

and their mercenary coteries get into a cyberspace ditzzy, shed crocodile tears, and hurl insults and threats against the Government and people of Eritrea.. Anyway, let us move on...

It is not only Israeli border guards that have killed Eritreans, here are some of the reports about those who were killed by Egyptian border guards while trying to cross into Israel:

On 29 August 2009 Maan News reported the following:

“...Egyptian border police shot and injured an Eritrean immigrant on Monday evening while he attempted to cross into Israel on the Sinai desert border...Egyptian security sources told Ma’an that the man was injured during an exchange of fire between Egyptian border police and traffickers hired to smuggle migrants into Israel. The incident occurred to the south of the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza...”

29 June 2010, Reuters reported the following:

“...Egyptian police shot and killed an Eritrean woman trying to cross Egypt's border into Israel, security sources said, bringing the number of migrants killed along the border so far this year to at least 19...The 38-year-old woman was shot three times - in the stomach, right arm and left hand - at a point midway along the Sinai border, the Egyptian security sources said...Police arrested another two Eritrean women and a child who were with the dead woman, whose body was transferred to a hospital in the northern Sinai city of el-Arish...”

On 7 July 2010, the following was reported by various news outlets:

“...Egyptian police shot and killed an Eritrean migrant as he tried to cross the border illegally into Israel, a security official said. Police had warned the 36-year-old man to stop and when he refused they fired shots, the official said...He was shot in the pelvis and died from internal bleeding. His body was then taken to the nearby El-Arish hospital, the official added...”

A 16 August 2010 report said:

“...A female Eritrean migrant died on Sunday of the wounds she sustained a day earlier in clashes between African migrants and human traffickers, a medical source told Xinhua...The Eritrean woman, in her twenties, was among a group of African migrants who were trying to cross the international borders into Israel when clashes took place in the Sinai Peninsula. She and three others were moved to the Al-Arish General Hospital on Saturday for treatment...Four Eritrean migrants were shot dead and 10 others were injured on Saturday in a clash with traffickers in the mountainous region south of Rafah and Karem Shalom crossings...”

On 17 January 2011, there was another report on the killing of an Eritrean migrant:

“...Egyptian border guards shot dead an African woman when she was spotted trying to infiltrate into Israel on Monday early morning, Egyptian border guards sources said. The sources said police patrolling the borders along the Sinai Peninsula spotted a woman approaching the border fence toward Israel, fired several warning shots into the air, and shot her dead when she continued to run. The sources said the victim was from Eritrea and her body was evacuated to Al-Arish Hospital...”

There are many more Eritreans who are killed by the traffickers and by Egyptian and other security forces, but there are many more who die on the road. Allow me to share some of what I found in Egypt. It is really heart wrenching to read the descriptions provided on each person as their body is released. The last time I was in Cairo, I got information on some of the Eritreans whose remains were sent home to Eritrea.

- He was light skinned and had curly black hair, had a thin moustache and was dressed in long-sleeved brown stripped shirt said the report written about Shimbruh Qismat, a 27 year old male from Adi Queyih. He was one of the known dead whose body was repatriated in 2009.
- 45-year old Berhane Tekie-Zgta from Segeneity was described as also being light skinned with graying short hair. Had bruises and lacerations on his abdomen and was wearing faded jeans and a colorful shirt. His knees were scarred. He was also repatriated from Egypt in 2009.

- Zeresenay Ghebrezghiabher is a 28-year old from Mai Ayni was described as being of medium height and was wearing blue jeans when he was announced dead at a hospital in Egypt. His body was repatriated in 2009.
- Tesfay Weldemichael Gebrezgiabher, a 26 year old from Segeneity died at the El-Arish hospital after three days. There is nothing else by which to identify him. His body was repatriated in 2009
- Tesfay Habte is also from Segeneity and there is no picture for him, so they can't tell how old he was. The description given says that his hair was long, and that he was slightly bearded. He was wearing a jacket and had a cross necklace that illuminated in the dark.
- Tesfamariam Iyob Beyene, age 25. He also died at El-Arish hospital. He is described as having course hair and a slightly tanned brown skinned. His teeth were uneven and small and he has a burn scar on his arm-looks like an old wound.
- Yirgalem, no last name listed, and no picture provided, is a 31 year old from Tserona. His description says that he is slightly bald, skinny and short. He had a big head with a little bit of hair in the back. He was wearing jeans with back pockets and a colorful shirt. He had pimples on his face. He was also wearing an arsenal t-shirt under his shirt. He is said to have a sister in one of the Middle Eastern countries. His body was repatriated in 2009.
- Gebrehiwot G. Desta is a 30 year old from Mai Ayni. He is short and light skinned. He was wearing a reddish short sleeved shirt with faded jeans. No facial hairs. Has a big scar on his left hand and also on his left ear. His body was repatriated in 2009.
- Mebrahtom H. Woldegabriel, no information available, beaten to death, body was never found. His fellow travelers provided the information
- Gebru Girmai from Molki was buried by an Eritrean comrade in Sahra, Sinai, he had succumbed to the elements.
- Tesfay Yemane Berhan, 27 year old from Mai Ayni, buried by an Eritrean comrade in Sinai, his body wouldn't go to where his mind wanted.
- Tesfa Desbele from Tserona also buried in Sinai by his Eritrean comrades
- Unidentified Eritrean from Senafe, buried on route by his comrades.

The record is clear. The malicious and deliberate mis-characterization of the Eritrean government, its Embassies and Eritrean communities is not only criminal, it is categorically false ...Despite the limited resources and access available to them, they have gone out of their way to help Eritrean youth and others in Egypt, Libya and Israel. None of the Eritrean "human rights" and "democracy" groups, nor self serving individuals such as Selam Kidane, Tesfaldet

Meharennna, Elsa Chyrum, Meron Estifanos and their coterie have contributed a single penny for the repatriation of the above bodies...yet, they wan to point fingers at the Eritrean Government and the Eritrean Diaspora communities.

In 1964, the OAU drew up a series of 'guiding principles' that involved actions by all African countries concerned with refugees, including the receiving countries, countries of origin, and third countries. Several of the principles dealt directly with the security concerns of interior ministers. For example, asylum countries were encouraged to settle refugees as far as possible from the borders of the country of origin and to not allow refugees to attack their country of origin. Asylum countries were also supposed to prohibit all subversive activity by refugees. Similarly, countries of origin were admonished neither to view the granting of asylum as an unfriendly gesture nor to attack the countries of refuge through the media, press, or radio or by resorting to arms. Finally, the host countries were told to try to promote voluntary repatriation as soon as possible.

But as we have seen in the last few years, these “guiding principles” are consistently violated by Ethiopia and its partners at UNHCR when it comes to Eritreans. Those who are brought to refugee camps in Ethiopia are actively recruited for subversive activities against their country of origin and are recruited by terrorist and other groups harbored by the minority regime in Ethiopia, including the Eritrean Islamic Jihad, to commit terrorist acts against Eritrea. Instead of promoting “voluntary repatriation”, the UNHCR and its partners are actively working to prevent the repatriation of Eritreans to Eritrea. It is instead accommodating the return of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin to Ethiopia. In addition, the various refugee camps established in Ethiopia have become another source of foreign currency for the minority regime and its partners. Next to selling Ethiopian babies in adoption schemes, and Falasha Jews to Israel, these refugee camps run jointly by Ethiopia and UNHCR have become a lucrative venture for the regime and its TPLF cadres.

When it comes to Eritreans, the international rules and regulations governing refugees is thrown out the window. A regime is instituted that governs only Eritrean refugees. Eritrea does not accept forcible repatriation of Eritrean, whether they are in Egypt, Israel, Europe or the United States. But if any Eritrean wants to return to Eritrea, he or she can do so by contacting the nearest Eritrean Embassy or Consulate. It should be recalled that in 2003, the Government of Eritrea granted Amnesty to youth who left their country illegally.

The rule of law must prevail over the law of the jungle!