



**The State of Eritrea**  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

## PRESS RELEASE

The Eritrean Foreign Ministry has issued a Press Release on 7 June 2011 regarding the British nationals “detained in Eritrea” for the crimes and offences they committed against Eritrean sovereignty.



It is to be recalled that the Ministry in its press release of 8 April, 2011, noted that, on this issue, it refrained from delving into diplomatic, propaganda, press and PR campaigns, thus handling the matter with utmost prudence and patience, and that it would release detailed facts in due course.

The full text of the Press Release follows:

### Crimes of the British Institution PVI and its members in Eritrea

Christopher Alan Collison, is a British national who claims to have been working as facilitator of Protection Vessels International (PVI) in Djibouti. Concealing his real identity, he requested an entry Visa from the Eritrean Embassy in Djibouti on 13 December 2010 for visiting Eritrea disguised as a tourist. Accordingly, he was granted the entry Visa, and arrived at Asmara International Airport on 17 December 2010.



The following day, 18 December 2010, Collison left for Massawa hiring a taxi with plate number ER-2-02315. And on 19 December 2010, he got in touch with Finan Shipping and Port Services Corporation requesting that it serve as an agent to facilitate in supplying a tourist vessel with food stuff and fuel. He informed the corporation that the vessel departed from the UK and was passing through Egypt en-route to Djibouti, and that it had run out of supplies. On the basis of Collison's fabricated account, after the legal procedures were met, a boat called SEA SCORPION, along with two speed boats called RED and GRAY RIBS, arrived in Massawa Port carrying 6 British 'sailors'.

During their stay in Massawa Port until 23 December 2010, Collison and the 6 sailors disguised as tourists claimed to have carried out repair work on one of the speed boats called GRAY RIBS, while loading the boat with food and fuel supplies. After conducting discussion on ways of securing payment either in cash or bank account for the services rendered by Finan Shipping and Port Services, they produced a document confirming payment made by a British bank and informed them that the sum had been sent through Western Union. As Finan Corporation needed confirmation of the payment made through the Bank of Eritrea on the one hand and due to the fact that those institutions that provide clearance had their office hours closed on the other, it was decided that both sides arrange a reschedule

for 7:00 a.m. the next morning. However, that same evening at 19:30 p.m., the 6 sailors and Collison himself who entered the country after acquiring a tourist visa made an attempt to flee Massawa using the SEA SCORPION as well as the speed boat RED RIB turning off lights and without securing any legal clearance whatsoever. After having traveled a distance of almost 3 nautical miles, they were given warning shots by members of the Eritrean Navy to stop. Thereafter, while the SEA SCORPION (KN252) carrying 4 sailors heeded the call, the RED RIB speed boat with 3 sailors fled.

The SEA SCORPION was brought under control. Following intensive search conducted on the GPS and computers of the boat as well as sailors, a number of still and moving pictures, as well as information messages were obtained that confirmed the violation of Eritrea's land and maritime sovereignty. On the basis of the information thus acquired, a search was conducted on the Eritrean Island of Romia, where a cache of sniper weapons fitted with silencers, telescopes, distance-monitoring equipments were secured. Moreover, night vision binoculars equipped with GPS, together with poison-tipped bullets, bullet-proof vests, specialized communication equipments, as well as V-SAT satellite telephones were seized during the search. The Island of Romia is an Eritrean island located 30 nautical miles inside sovereign Eritrean territorial waters.

All the British nationals in detention fully admitted that they "have committed a crime in having illegally and repeatedly entering sovereign Eritrean Island as well as violating the country's territorial waters bearing armaments, in addition to attempting to escape from Massawa". And in doing so, they expressed regret for their actions. Besides, they have repeatedly and strongly pleaded for amnesty for their criminal acts. As for Collison, the PVI representative in Djibouti who had legally acquired entry Visa to Eritrea disguised as a tourist, admitted that he had committed a crime by posing himself as a tourist and trying to escape from Massawa illegally by boat.

## **Outcome of the Investigation**

### **Concerning PROTECTION VESSELS INTERNATIONAL (PVI)**

PVI is one of the many emerging armed institutions claiming to be engaged in anti-piracy activities. It is an organization mainly based in the UK and owned by a British national named Domenic Mee, a former member of the British Royal Marines. He claims to have more than 200-strong employees, the majority of whom are themselves former members of the British Royal Marines. Besides, some are civil seamen.

PVI owns the following 4 ships and an unspecified large number of speed boats:

1. AL 345 flying the British flag
2. AM 230 flying the British flag
3. DM 234 flying the British flag
4. KN 252 (SEA SCORPION) flying the Egyptian flag

While the 3 PVI ships carry the British flag, KN 252 SEA SCORPION operates with the Egyptian flag. When it entered Massawa Port and later was seized trying to escape, it was flying the Egyptian flag. This fact represents a deliberate cover-up in view of the fact that a vessel entering Eritrean territorial waters with an Egyptian flag is regarded as being more acceptable and logical.

It is on record that PVI bought SEA SCORPION in Alexandria, Egypt, on 07/2010 and that it underwent repair and

test in the Egyptian port of Hurgada; it entered Port Sudan on 11/10/2010, in addition to taking about a month to have a new generator installed in it, thus subsequently embarking on conducting activities from its permanent deployment, i.e. (17o N to 18o N) in mid-November 2010, and pursuing its routine work in the Red Sea. This has been confirmed by documents secured and testimonies obtained from the accused parties. (17o N to 18o N) are coordinates that stretch from Bab Adem (50 km South of Marsa Teklai) to Ras Kesar.

### **Crimes committed by PVI against sovereign Eritrean territorial waters and islands**

1. On 22/11/2010 an unknown number of PVI members entered the Island of Romia (16o24'N and 40o 05'E), located 30 nautical miles inside Eritrea using the RED RIB speed boat. The crew conducted intensive surveillance, during which they took video footage of the entire island. Moreover, 2 PVI members entered the island with a view to identifying a suitable spot for anchor, the vegetation of the island and possible sites for cover, as well as prospects of potable water sources. All relevant information they acquired was transmitted via radio, and the footage they compiled in the process is documented as evidence.
2. The PVI members anchored the speed boat named GRAY RIB at Romia Island on 25/11/2010. (The film shots the group compiled are documented as evidence.)
3. The documents obtained from the group have ascertained that the owner of PVI, Domenic Mee, docked at Romia Island on 26/11/2010 through the ship SEA SCORPION and the speed boat RED RIB along with an unspecified number of armed members and other support personnel.
4. On 30/11/2010 a 10-member armed group and other support staff headed by Domenic Mee, using the ship SEA SCORPION and the speed boat RED RIB invaded the sovereign Eritrean Island of Romia staging tactical military maneuvers and in possession of various types of weapons, thus staying there for a number of days. These activities are on record by the still and moving pictures they took on 30/11/2010. What's more, the accused themselves have confirmed their encampment on the island.
4. The PVI carried out repeated acts of espionage and intelligence work on Harmil Island which is located 31.38 nautical miles inside Eritrean territorial waters through its ship AL-345 and the speed boat RED RIB. In an electronic mail he addressed to members of the SEA SCORPION dated 12/12/2010, Domenic Mee, relayed information concerning the outcome of the spying activities undertaken and his observations about the island. He also sent out information that the speed boat RED RIB was spotted by members of the Eritrean Naval Force, in addition to the fact that their AL-345 ship made a speedy escape thereafter. Domenic Mee further warned the SEA SCORPION staff to strictly avoid passing through Harmil Island during their journey to Massawa, in view of the fact that RED RID was spotted by members of the Eritrean Naval Force near Harmil Island on a previous occasion, and that it should not be identified as being an integral part of the SEA SCORPION ship. He further warned the crew of the need to exercise caution taking into account



the possibility that members of the Eritrean Naval Force are likely to possess communication facilities. These acts conclusively prove that the PVI has carried out acts of espionage on sovereign Eritrean territorial waters and islands. (The necessary documents along with concrete evidence are available.)

5. On 19/12/2010, 17 armed members of the PVI and 4 support staff entered Romia Island through KN-252 SEA SCORPION and RED RIB. 4 armed British nationals, namely Pinington Henry, Moorhead Paul, Montgomery Robert, and Ternbul Mark headed to international waters on 20/12/2010 from Romia Island through the RED RIB speed boat.
6. 6 British members of PVI departed from Romia Island on 20/12/2010 mounting two speed boats on the SEA SCORPION and disguised as tourists and under the pretension of loading food stuff and fuel supplies. In due course, they arrived in Massawa on 21/12/2010 after having exercised maximum caution against the possibility of being spotted by the Eritrean Naval Force by traveling through unused and unfamiliar sea routes between the Isratu and Dihil Islands.
7. In total, 11 seamen kept themselves in hiding at Romia Island from 19/12/2010 to 23/12/2010 and in the possession of an unspecified number of military hardware, various equipments, as well as communication facilities. These seamen were given directives to keep guard in twos and to pose as "tourists keen to observe sharks" upon any inquiry. Hence, this conclusively proves that the PVI has been making use of the Eritrean Island of Romia as its military base and arms depot.
8. On 23/12/2010, the six British nationals who infiltrated into Massawa under the guise of acquiring food stuff, and fuel and Christopher Alan Collison who entered under the pretext of being a tourist from Djibouti escaped from Massawa Port at night with their boats, the SEA SCORPION and RED RIBS turning off lights and without securing the necessary legal permits. After a journey of 3 nautical miles, the SEA SCORPION along with the currently detained 4 British seamen was captured following a warning shot fired by members of the Eritrean Naval Force. The RED RIB speed boat along with 3 seamen managed to escape and proceeded to Romia Island where it disappeared taking with it 11 armed personnel, as well as military hardware and equipments from the island. (Names of those who escaped from Massawa and Romia Island along with their arms are documented)
9. Members of the Eritrean Naval Force confirmed that on 24/12/2010, an unidentified mother-ship carrying a boat was conducting surveillance activities from 9:00 a.m. to 16:00 p.m. along a distance of 5 nautical miles north-west of Romia Island. It is indisputable that the intention of the ship was to follow up the overall situation of the SEA SCORPION and the detained PVI members, in addition trying to remove the remaining military hardware at Romia Island.
10. During surveillance activities undertaken by members of the Eritrean Naval Force in Romia Island on 24/12/2010, military hardware packed in 8 big boxes was discovered that comprised 18 different types of sniper rifles with lenses and silencers, 8 pistols, 10 sophisticated communication radios, 10 bulletproof vests, 7 helmets, 1,700 bullets of various types, including poison-tipped ones, 2 GPS equipped infrared night vision binoculars. (Details of these weapons and devices are documented)
11. On 24/12/2010 at 8:58 p.m. the commander of SEA SCORPION, Copral Alun Edward Sims, while in detention sent e-mail to the operations commander, Mark Cowell, informing him to transfer the armed men and military hardware in Romia Island to international territorial waters. On top of providing information that such

elements were those who intentionally committed the crimes, this e-mail was sent with a view to covering up evidence.

12. On 24/12/2010 at 9:44 p.m. PVI Operations Commander Mark Cowell sent an e-mail to Alun Edward Sims while in detention ordering him to delete all e-mail messages whenever he got the chance to do so. His message is documented as evidence. In accordance with such an order, Alun Edward Sims deleted the hard disk of the computer in the ship. To restore the deleted hard disk was to some extent a time-consuming process. This act of annulling evidence was resorted in fear that they would entail accountability for the crimes committed.
14. PVI infiltrated into the Eritrean territorial waters and islands via the ship SEA SCORPION from 22/11/2010 to 23/12/2010 carrying a number of boxes with military hardware, equipments and communication devices. (Documents attesting to these acts are available).

## The pretexts PVI applied to commit the aforementioned crimes

### 1. 'Anti-piracy' pretext

Although the detained members and the discovered documents reveal that the institution provides 'anti-piracy' service in Red Sea international waters 17°N to 18°E, no act of piracy whatsoever has occurred in the aforementioned part of the Red Sea (north of Dahlak Island).



When PVI deployed its members in the Red Sea 17°N to 18°E in November 2010 under the guise of fighting piracy, it immediately resorted to infiltrating 30 nautical miles deep inside sovereign Eritrean territorial waters on 22/12/2010 through its speed boat RED RIBS. Following the surveillance of the Romia Island, it used it as a safe haven for hiding its military hardware and equipment, as well as the base for its armed members during the period between the end of November to 23 December 2010. This act has been confirmed by the documented and material evidences seized. Such acts are tantamount to invasion and violation of sovereign Eritrean territory, having no correlation to piracy and anti-piracy activities.

### 2. Pretext under tourist cover

At a time when members of the PVI approached the Finan Shipping and Port Services Corporation via their facilitating agent in Djibouti, Christopher Alan Collison, they requested that he serve as a facilitating agent for obtaining food stuff and fuel from the Massawa Port that would be used by tourists who crossed to Djibouti via Egypt originating from the UK. Besides, the PVI agent who traveled from Djibouti to Eritrea to facilitate the issue of the institution, approached the Eritrean Embassy in Djibouti and requested for a tourist visa. The discovered documentary evidence also proved that the armed members of the institution who remained in hiding at Romia Island along with their weapons were informed by



the institution to appear as “tourists keen to observe sharks” in a bid to cover up their true identity.

### **3. Pretext under the guise of loading food stuff and fuel supply**

Loading food stuff and fuel supply was a ploy employed by PVI members to enter Massawa, which in itself constitutes a pretext. And this in view of the fact that if at all the PVI really provides anti-piracy service, it has ample opportunity to secure food stuff and supplementary fuel supply from the big commercial ships to which it provides its so-called service within the periphery of international waters and without wasting extra fuel. However, putting aside such opportunity, the institution used the loading of food and fuel as a guise for engaging in other missions. After undertaking surveillance and intelligence work at Harmil Island through its ship and speed boats, it deployed and hid armed members along with military hardware in the sovereign Eritrean Island of Romia. Entering Massawa originating from the Island through the sea route which was not familiar at all to any ship or boat before, constitutes a continuation of its acts of espionage, sabotage as well as surveillance activities, and not for the simple reason of obtaining food stuff and fuel supply. Moreover, if at all the PVI was in real need of food stuff and fuel from Massawa Port, it would have had no problem whatsoever to obtain entrance permit through the usual practice of revealing its true identity, the number of its members as well as weapons in its possession to the Eritrean authorities. However, it made futile attempts to enter the country under a number of aggressive pretexts, simply because its intention and mission objectives were in essence hostile.

### **4. Legal accountability of PVI and its members**

1. PVI committed acts of invasion against sovereign Eritrean territorial waters and islands from November to December 2010 by deploying a number of armed members along with various military hardware at Romia Island using KN252 SEA SCORPION and 2 speed boats. In doing so, the institution repeatedly used the Island as a base and safe haven of its armed members and arms depot. As a result of such acts of invasion, Domenic Mee and his institution, as well as the 4 detained individuals, including the 22 PVI members that escaped who repeatedly infiltrated into sovereign Eritrean territorial waters and islands are to be held accountable for the act.
2. On 19/12/2010, 21 members of the PVI (including those 4 detained) infiltrated and deployed different types of weapons, poison-tipped bullets, bulletproof vests, specialized communication equipment and infrared night-vision binoculars in the sovereign Eritrean Island of Romia. There is high possibility that such military hardware is intended for perpetrating acts of terrorism and sabotage. Hence, the members are accountable for infiltrating into the sovereign Eritrean Island of Romia and stashing weaponry, for orchestrating acts of espionage and terrorism.
3. The head of PVI is to be held accountable for undertaking spying activities through RED RIB speed motor boat and AL-345 ship over the movements of the Eritrean Naval Force in the environs of sovereign Eritrean Island of Harmil.
4. The head of PVI and the detained members are to be held accountable for the criminal act of escaping from Massawa without fulfilling the necessary clearance obligations in violation of the nation's maritime law, in addition to disappearing by speed boats carrying 11 armed members and unidentified number of weaponry from Romia Island.



5. Those who escaped from Massawa and managed to take out 11 armed members along with military hardware from Romia Island are to be held accountable for organizing acts of terrorism and sabotage, as well as concealing evidences. (Their names are documented).
6. All those members of the PVI who infiltrated into sovereign Eritrean territory through the SEA SCORPION ship and participated in acts of invasion, organizing sabotage, terrorism and espionage bear accountability for their aforementioned criminal deeds. (Details concerning the names of all the individuals are documented)
7. Christopher Alan Collison who managed to obtain a tourist visa and arrived in the country through Asmara International Airport, but tried to escape illegally without the necessary legal clearance with his colleagues from Massawa on 23/12/2010 and subsequently apprehended following the warning shot, is to be held accountable for acts of deception and violation of the nation's immigration laws.
8. The British government is equally to be held accountable for issuing a permit that was used as a cover for the criminals who, using weapons, committed acts of aggression, espionage, terrorism and sabotage in sovereign Eritrean territorial waters and islands in gross violation of international law.

The detailed information thus presented is in full conformity with the volume of evidences acquired, as well as the testimony of the PVI members presently under detention. In any case, the legal proceedings connected with this matter have not yet been finalized. The issue of those who managed to escape and the military hardware and equipments they took with them is also to be viewed within the framework of subsequent legal process.

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

**7 June 2011**

**Asmara**