**Eritrean Community In Winnipeg Inc.**

**P.O.BOX 1105, Station Main. Winnipeg, MB. Postal Code. R3C 2X4**

**www.eritreancommunity.ca Tel 204 415 2248**

December 15. 2011

Ms. Margo Goodhand
Editor
Winnipeg Free Press

1355 Mountain Avenue

Winnipeg, MB R2X 3B6

Dear Ms. Goodhand:

Re: Articles in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on the Eritrean Community in Winnipeg, Inc.

The purpose of our letter is:

* To bring to your attention the serious issue created by repeated publications in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, alleging support of terrorism, money extortion and breach of confidentiality by the Eritrean Community and its members in Winnipeg and in Canada, based on politically motivated **unfounded allegation** and a serious **mass media distortion** of facts.
* **To urge** you to rectify the **defamation**, **stigmatization** and **unnecessary polarization** created due to the published articles in your newspaper and **to restore the reputation** of a vibrant law abiding and peaceful community that has fought against terrorism and has been victimized by it.
* To inform you that the wider Eritrean Community is outraged by the publications and severity of unfounded allegations.

We are referring to the following articles:

*“Protest links seminar to Eritrean terrorists” by Matt Preprost*

*Winnipeg Free Press*, August 23, 2010

[*http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/protest-links-seminar-to-eritrean-terrorists-101283344.htm*](http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/protest-links-seminar-to-eritrean-terrorists-101283344.htm)

**“Country they fled has long tentacles Regime taps Eritrean refugees for cash**”By Carol Sanders, *Winnipeg Free Press,* November 25, 2011

<http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/country-they-fled-has-long-tentacles-134482753.html>

<http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/letters_to_the_editor/134812883.html>

**Our concerns are as follows:**

* Eritrean-Canadians all over Canada are outraged, deeply saddened, dismayed, and deeply concerned by these publications of politically motivated, unfounded allegations and the implications of these articles to the wider Winnipeg and Canadian Community.
* We are strongly disturbed by the notion that African issues do not require more thorough research before publishing such serious allegations, without carefully looking into the damage these unproven allegation could bring to the reputation of the local Eritrean Community, the Canadian–Eritrean Community across Canada and the Immigrant and African newcomer communities in general.
* We are deeply worried that these allegations irreversibly stigmatize, polarize and incite hate and violence among the African communities, and in particular the communities originating from the Horn of Africa and Middle East.
* We, as Canadians of Eritrean origin, are deeply concerned that the word “terrorism” is being used against us in your paper’s articles. By characterizing entire local communities and labelling them as terrorists or alleging they are linked to terrorism, there is a very damaging sense of distrust being created among our fellow Canadian friends and neighbours with unpredictable complications.
* We urge the *Winnipeg Free Press* to quickly rectify the damage and reassess the language used when dealing with these sensitive issues, especially when the word “terrorism” is being used in regard to local populations with no evidence of the allegations.
* Africa has undergone through many liberation struggles. You cannot retroactively reassess Africa’s history, leaders and freedom fighters and now label them as terrorists. It will be in complete disregard of the historical context of colonization in Africa that happened with the most violent and inhuman practices.

The research done by the writers, with a one-sided story presented to the public, has stigmatized our community and has done a great disservice to your readers. We believe that your respected paper is being used by some politically motivated individuals to engage in a process of **mass media distortion** by alleging our local Eritrean community of law-abiding Canadian citizens and new Canadians as terrorists and money extorters.

The two articles are quick to criminalize the good nature of Canadian Eritreans and our brave efforts and financial sacrifices to rehabilitate on our own goodwill and support for our war-ravaged homeland of Eritrea.

For your information, the Eritrean Community In Winnipeg Inc. has had no hand in the 2% rehabilitation tax. The 2% rehabilitation tax is applicable only to those dual citizenship holders, including Canadian-Eritreans, who want to do business within Eritrea as Eritrean citizens. The Eritrean Community in Winnipeg has no responsibility in this regard and, therefore, we cannot respond to the details of the process.

As citizens of Eritrea, we are very conscious of the benefits this rehabilitation tax is doing to our war ravaged country.

* We believe reducing poverty is the best way to eliminate grounds for radicalism. Eritreans have been victims of terrorism. The thousands of Canadian-Eritrean Diaspora who pay the 2% rehabilitation tax have been doing it knowingly that their money has been used to rehabilitate war orphans and handicaps. The rehabilitation tax is used to assist Eritrean brothers and sisters at times of difficulty and disasters and to restore agricultural, health and education sectors in post independence Eritrea since 1992. It should be highly appreciated and admired by all those Canadians who have been helping the needy of the world, learning from the generosity of fellow Canadians, we believe we should be at the forefront to help needy Eritreans.

To Criminalizea caring attitude, a responsible and effective way of defying terrorism and prevent it, before it is even created is a clear **distortion** of the facts and wrongfully attributing non existent attitudes, intension and practices to New Canadians of Eritrean origin and the Eritrean Community In Winnipeg Inc.

**In a concreted effort the articles’ writers are omitting essential information about the accusers.**

Both accusers in the article were educated and became nurse and journalist with the 2% rehabilitation tax contribution of the Eritrean diaspora. They got higher education for free, worth of tens of thousands; they did not pay the Eritrean public in service as they were expected to do. Is this the extortion they are referring to? Imagine who is doing the extortion. These are some of the things we are asking you to do a thorough research. Could someone ask for transcripts from any university without paying for the services or without honoring his/her part of the agreement?

These issues of defamation published in the Winnipeg Free Press against the wider Eritrean-Canadian Communities and the Eritrean Community In Winnipeg Inc. related to allegations of terrorism could also create a dangerous precedence of marginalization and stigmatization of new Canadians.

* We believe both articles were one sided and the members of the Eritrean Community in Winnipeg were not been given an **equal** opportunity to respond to the serious allegations*.* ***The information obtained from the accused was superficial, poorly done and the information obtained from the accusers poorly researched and cross-referenced.***

e.g. the accusers refer to extortion of money from local Eritrean community and “agents” but the truth is completely the opposite.

Please note:

A) The Eritrean diaspora had paid their tuition fees and supported the education of the accusers. *In the article this is totally omitted and literally distorted.*

B) New Canadians of Eritrean Origin are overwhelmingly welcomed and assisted in Winnipeg by the Eritrean Community In Winnipeg Inc. by its members and by the people who pay rehabilitation taxes and supported their education, and the education of their brothers and sisters who are left behind in Eritrea.

C) Those who know the nature of the Eritrean Community In Winnipeg Inc. can tell you about the programs and volunteer work we do to assist new refugees and immigrants. There is documented monumental work of care and compassion, during the 30 years of existence of the Eritrean Community in Manitoba which has helped thousands of Canadians of Eritrean origin to succeed in Manitoba and Canada.

Many of your previous articles can confirm that. Please read some examples of which were even written by Carol Sanders herself. (Please n**ote that Carol is referring to the same people with completely opposite characterization):**

* + **caring versus money extorters,**
	+ **socially and politically mature versus terrorism,**
	+ **people engaged in a celebration versus fearful members,**
	+ **People outspoken and joyful versus people that feel that their Personal information has been breached).**

**See:**

[**http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/our-communities/lance/Small-tutoring-program-yielding-big-results-97871699.html?device=mobile&c=y**](http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/our-communities/lance/Small-tutoring-program-yielding-big-results-97871699.html?device=mobile&c=y)

[**http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/picturing-a-better-life-ahead-97650754.html**](http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/picturing-a-better-life-ahead-97650754.html)

[**http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/photography-helps-ease-the-spirit-for-single-mom-97651279.html?viewAllComments=y**](http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/photography-helps-ease-the-spirit-for-single-mom-97651279.html?viewAllComments=y)

[**http://www.cbc.ca/manitoba/scene/other/2011/05/18/post-11/**](http://www.cbc.ca/manitoba/scene/other/2011/05/18/post-11/)

D) Post Eritrea’s Independence in 1991, it was the Eritrean diaspora that recommended and established a 2% rehabilitation tax. This has helped rehabilitate 20,000 orphans, 60,000 disabled, and thousands of families who were victims of the 30 year war for independence. (See attached personal story linked to Winnipeg and to the president of the Eritrean Community in Winnipeg).

E) The 2% rehabilitation tax and the Eritrean diaspora contribution paid the education and tuition of the two accusers to become a nurse and a journalist and the two accusers seem to lack memory or recollection; instead they claim to be advocates of human rights and to represent faith organizations and they are accusing their benefactors as funding terrorists. They were the beneficiaries. Are they telling us they are terrorists? If you want, we can get you the statistics on how far Eritrea has advanced in providing healthcare, education and food security for its citizens. You can compare Eritrea’s performance vis-à-vis the UN Millennium Development goals with other African nation and do the simple math that will show you how bogus and politically motivated the allegations are.

F) The Eritrean Community In Winnipeg Inc. has sponsored more than 1500 applicant refugees and supported their relatives here through the Private Sponsorship Program. This successful program was completed with extreme diligence, a profound sense of care and respect for the sponsoring families and the principal applicants and the confidentiality of their information.

(We have declarations signed by the sponsoring people that will be submitted to you and CIC as additional evidence about process and fees.)

G) It is with a sense of social wisdom that we started healing the wounds of the consequences of Ethiopia’s refusal to implement the Algier’s Agreement and Ethiopia’s refusal to implement the demarcation process in 2001.

E) In 2001 we joined the Private Sponsorship Program in Collaboration with Manitoba Interfaith and CIC. In a real observance of Eritrean and Canadian values of caring, the Eritrean Community took the responsibility of healing the wounds of fellow citizens. We started 10 years before the accusers had even perceived the idea of helping fellow new Canadians. We have been practicing our Human Rights duties while we were supporting their education to become a nurse and a journalist. The writers of the articles have missed all this information! Is this deliberate or was all this information omitted by mistake? Have the articles’ writers realized that we were sponsoring refugees when the accusers were still in Eritrea?

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* The tw articlewriters have shown to have very poor insight on the issues of the Horn of Africa, and the very complex dynamics of the present political situation.
* In an extreme exaggeration of the facts, the following articles go beyond imagination to allege that Eritrean Canadians are ready to attack Canada. If they are serious about the articles, the two involved would do a serious investigation to expose such a plot, so that all of us Canadians will be spared of any ill intention that is designed to harm us.

<http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/11/05/eritrea-is-raising-money-in-canada-and-financing-terrorists-that-want-to-attack-canada/>

<http://www.alenalki.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7281:response-to-the-editof-of-national-post-eritrean-canadian-association-of-ontario&catid=1:latest-news&Itemid=53>

F) 70.000 Eritreans were deported from Ethiopia during 1998-2000 war. They were forcibly separated from their families and children. They were deported with not a single penny in their pocket. Did the international community assist any of them? Millions were donated from

the Eritrean diaspora to rehabilitate these victims of ethnic cleansing that the Ethiopian Prime Minister openly boasted about expelling Eritreans for “**not liking the color of their eyes**”.

The international community remained disturbingly silent at that time. **It is the Eritrean diaspora that intervened to rehabilitate these people who were traumatized by being forced to walk through mined front-lines in the middle of the night**. Carol Sanders did not ask why the Eritrean Community was donating money at the time, how was it was able to fundraise that money, but was quick to attach an allegation of terrorism to it. Ostensibly, some of the

$12,328 .37 referred in the article was done by the organization of one of the accusers as a fundraising by selling food and tea in 2000.

Matt Prost and Carol Sanders have not shown the required journalistic diligence and they stigmatized our members and communities by alleging terrorist activities or linked to terrorist or funding terrorism, extortion of money and breach of Personal Information Act.

We believe that they acted irresponsibly and not in full knowledge of the implications of the allegations to the wider African and middle East Community of Manitoba and Canada.

Carol Sanders has fallen into the trap of victimizing her local community (Eritrean Community In Winnipeg) **but not recognizing that the accusers were using their own local community as a sacrificial lamb for their ulterior political motives (outside of the political sphere of the Winnipeg community and Canada)** in order to maximize the UN sanctions, originally drafted by Ethiopia, later on were watered down to take the form taken on December 5th of 2011. Even the words of the text of the original document that Ethiopia tried to push through the UN system and those used by the *Free Press* were identical. Had the *Free Press* done its homework right, it would have found out, it was being used as a vehicle for a political motive. This goes against the grain of Canadian decency, fairness and neutrality that many have come to appreciate. The accusers aimed to sensationalize the news in order to serve ulterior political motives that come from a different centre than the wider majority of Eritrean political diaspora- the Ethiopian government in Addis Ababa.

See:

<http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/11/05/eritrea-is-raising-money-in-canada-and-financing-terrorists-that-want-to-attack-canada/>

<http://www.alenalki.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7281:response-to-the-editof-of-national-post-eritrean-canadian-association-of-ontario&catid=1:latest-news&Itemid=53>

Carol Sanders, by being unable to identify the political language coming from the Regime in Addis Ababa, chose to rehash accusations, and in the process, has unjustly stigmatized her local Winnipeg Eritrean Community.

See:

<http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/letters_to_the_editor/134812883.html>

We do appreciate Carol Sanders’ effort and interest in newcomers and African Communities. With this article though, she has shown lack of knowledge of the dynamics of the Horn of African politics and she did a great disservice to the *Winnipeg Free Press* readers and the public by implicating the Canadians of Eritrean origin as funding terrorism, as forcibly paying a 2% rehabilitation tax to the Eritrean Government, promoting money extortion from refugees, and violating basic rights of our community

**B) Firebrand speaker triggers ban bid Fearful of anti-Semitic incitement**

By: Carol Sanders Posted: 05/21/2011 1:00 AM

See:

[www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/firebrand-speaker-triggers-ban-bid-122381158.html](http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/firebrand-speaker-triggers-ban-bid-122381158.html)

[www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/letters\_to\_the\_editor/122765614.html?device=mobile](http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/letters_to_the_editor/122765614.html?device=mobile)

Eritrea is one of the few Middle East countries that have an Embassy in Israel; Israel also has one in Eritrea. Most of all, the issue of anti-Semitism is inconceivable among the Eritrean population and the Eritrean Community In Winnipeg Inc. A sizeable majority of Eritreans speak one of three Semitic languages, share a Semitic culture, consider themselves to be of a Semitic origin. The issue that was reported was taken out of proportion and we are still trying to clarify the misunderstanding and misinformation. Furthermore, we also know, by experience, how much a population can suffer when the world chooses to be indifferent.

This is a sensitive issue, very much at heart for us that we are going to deal with our Jewish brothers and sisters in our own way. Our people by tradition and religion remember the Jewish people in every single prayer of the day by referring to the Hebrew scripts of the Bible. Half of our names are of Hebrew background; and many in Eritrea believe to be of Semitic descent. **It is a paradox and an oxymoron for us to be anti-Semitic.** It is the wrong card to play for the accusers. Carol Sanders regretfully failed to recognize this too.

We strongly ask you to properly identify the issues at stake and rectify the unwarranted marginalization and stigmatization of the Eritrean Community and local African Communities in Winnipeg by doing thorough research and analysis on the issues at hand, and provide a fair and balanced reporting before publishing blanket accusations.

We ask for a meeting with you, Bob Cox and Carol Sanders to discuss the issues further for correction.

**We will be demonstrating in front of your offices (Winnipeg Free Press) on Thursday the 15th of December 2011, at 12:30 p.m.**

Sincerely,

Board Members of the ERITREAN COMMUNITY IN WINNIPEG INC.

Demonstration Organizing Committee.

**Lambros Kyriakakos 204 794498 1****lkyriak@shaw.ca**

**Yohannes Mehari 204 8802260**

**Mehari Negusse 204 296 6112**

**M. Ogbagabriel 204 6883777**

cc: Mr. Bob Cox, Publisher

cc: Ms. Carol Sanders, Reporter

cc: Citizenship and Immigration

cc: Welcome Place