

Eritrean Festivals: exposing the hypocrisy of the West.

Over the last couple of weeks, peaceful Eritrean communities in western Europe and North America were shocked to witness the violent attempts to disrupt their annual “Festival Eritrea” celebrations that have been held now, for over thirty years in different countries and until this year, in a peaceful and festive-oriented, family-friendly manner. This year, however, a coordinated and well-funded disruptive movement was unleashed on festival goers in Germany, London, Sweden, Canada, and The United States. Closer scrutiny will reveal that the *modus operandi* of the violent disruptors was identical: after getting permission to hold counterdemonstrations outside the festival grounds, they immediately turned violent and attacked the peaceful attendees including elderly mothers and grandmothers, burnt down properties including cars and even stabbed individuals. All this under the very eyes of the respective police forces who were literally standing by watching things unfold. Perhaps very tellingly of the imbecility of these thugs, is that they even turned on the police – who for the most part until that point were standing by unwilling to call in reinforcements – thereby forcing a reaction from the police who were left with no other option but to call for reinforcements, it was these reinforcements that stopped further carnage and pillaging from taking place. But the damage had already been done. Apart from Sweden, the festivals were either cancelled or moved to a smaller location, as was the case in Toronto, Canada.

Following the aftermath of these events, the western mainstream media did not waste time in trying to justify the actions of these hooligans by claiming that these peaceful festivals were fund-raising events organized by the Eritrean government. Some were even claiming that the funds collected were then used to supply the Eritrean Defense Forces. Various western media outlets were quick to interview known anti-Eritrean government elements such as professors, analysts, and so-called human-rights experts, who not-surprisingly seemed to be reading from the same script when they tried to justify (falling just short of condoning) the actions of the thugs and terrorists. Here in Canada, people like Prof. Awet from Queens University even tried to add what he called a “socio-political context” to the hooliganism, again giving justification to the wanton destruction of private property and terrorizing of innocent festival goers of all ages including the elderly and very young kids, on the pretext that the festival was organized by pro-Eritrean government elements.

Be that as it may, there seems to be one very vital issue that the likes of the aforementioned professor and all the media outlets that have and continue to report on these shameful and cowardly acts are forgetting or conveniently omitting: ***the fact that innocent Canadians were targeted because they were exercising their constitutional and human right to gather peacefully, and more importantly, that they were denied this fundamental right of theirs by a bunch of hooligans and terrorists.*** Every Canadian, not least Eritrean-Canadians has the right to gather – for *whatever reasons*, be it to support or denounce theirs or any other government – if they abide by the laws and are granted permission by the relevant authorities. This is what the peaceful festival goers were doing – gathering! It is irrelevant who organized the festival and what the festival stands for as long as it does not contravene any law of the country, which Eritrean Festivals have never done in the over three-decades in which they have taken place, peacefully and without incident. If there are people who want to demonstrate outside the festival grounds, they too have a right to do so, again only if they abide by the relevant laws and by-laws of the city, which clearly stipulates that they must do it

peacefully. This, the protestors did not do, and it is very telling of the real motives of those masquerading as political activists and demonstrators, when on the one hand they decry what they consider to be a lack of democracy in Eritrea, only to deny others, who do not agree with them, their democratic and human rights!

Those who have followed the events around the Eritrean Festivals, are in no doubt who the anti-democratic elements are. As such, the responsibility of safe-guarding the democratic, constitutional, and human rights of Canadians and in this case, Eritrean-Canadians, falls squarely on the Government of Canada, the Provincial Government of Ontario, The City of Toronto and the Ontario Police Force as well as the Courts of Justice. The hooligans must be brought to justice and charged with engaging in anti-constitutional criminal acts! Too much focus has been placed on the nature of the festival and why it was organized, which is nothing more than a smokescreen to divert attention from the real and pressing issue — the denial of peaceful and law-abiding Canadian citizens of their right to gather peacefully for a peaceful and law-abiding reason. The ball sits squarely in the court of the Federal and Provincial governments to ensure that the anti-democratic elements are not only brought to court but to also ensure that the constitutional and human rights of Canadian Eritreans and Eritreans residing in Canada, are protected, and enforced as enshrined in the Canadian Constitution.

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