

December 14, 2008

TO: - The Israeli Government (the National Status Granting Body)

CC: - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR) – Israel
- Amnesty International
- Human Rights Watch

RE: Eritrean asylum seekers' demonstration in Tel Aviv

We, the undersigned concerned individuals and human rights organizations, duly note that in the past three years Israel has received close to 13,000 immigrants 4,500 of which are Eritreans. We also commend the Israeli government's decision of granting to all Eritreans temporary work permits on humanitarian grounds and for sparing them from risks of deportation back to Egypt or Eritrea which would have put their life in real danger. We also wish to use this opportunity to state a very sad deportation of close to 1200 Eritreans from Egypt this year more 700 of whom have just ended in prisons of the repressive regime in Eritrea.

However, while the Eritrean asylum seekers in Israel are, as things stand now, under no threat of deportation and we continue to keep faith they will not be, they have not been recognized as refugees under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. As a result, they have been living in a situation of uncertainty and they have not been able to get benefits the Convention and its Protocol confers to them.

While we do consider the big figure of asylum seekers and the pressure on the asylum application determination process, given Israel's capabilities, we also believe that an adequate mechanism has not been put in place. As a matter of fact, none of the Eritrean nationals were even interviewed by the UNHCR - a prerequisite for determination of refugee status in Israel.

We strongly believe that the asylum seekers, Eritrean and others alike, have a right to have their cases heard and expeditiously determined. It is our position that Israel (with or without the assistance of the UNHCR) is under a legal obligation to consider individual applications for asylum under the 1951 Convention. Israel cannot simply do with granting work permits, based on humanitarian grounds but must consider individual applications by Eritreans.

It is in this regard that these close to 4,500 Eritrean asylum seekers in Israel are holding a peaceful demonstration on December 16, 2008 in Tel Aviv. The "Give us Refugee status/ asylum" theme of the demonstration is a continuation of the ongoing endeavors and demonstrations those Eritrean immigrants have been undertaking and it indeed shows their uncertain situation which have not enabled them to chart out their life. We thus join them in their demonstration and urge the international community in general and the Israeli government in particular to pay conscious attention to their situation.

We also wish to state our readiness to help in the process in any way we could.

Sincerely,

The signatories