



A PETITION DRIVE TO HELP ERITREAN REFUGEES, IMPRISONED IN LIBYA AND EGYPT

This is a petition drive sponsored by Qalna Eritrean Human right group, other Eritrean organizations and individuals. We are calling you to participate in this letter writing campaign to help Eritrean refugees, who are imprisoned in Libya's and Egypt's prisons.

1. A Brief introduction of the Problem.

As most of us know, there are about 600 Eritrean refugees, who have been incarcerated in very bad conditions in Libya and Egypt's prison camps. They are mostly single men and a few women and including children born in the prison. Those who are in Libya are mostly put in prison after they had been caught crossing the Mediterranean Sea or being salvaged from sinking boats. Others were caught while they were in preparation to travel and a few of them were picked up from their houses. Of those in Egypt, mostly they were caught while crossing to Israel, entering to Egypt from Sudan or rounded up from within Egypt.

2. The Conditions of Eritrean Refugees

In Libya, Eritrean refugees are held in a prison called Misrata, in the city of Misrata. Some of the Eritrean refugees stayed in other prisons until they were brought to the prison. Whereas in Egypt, there is no clear information as to where they are exactly held. However, it is widely believed that they are detained in different prisons in Cairo and other places.

Eritrean refugees are held in inhuman conditions in these prisons. Their rights are not respected and they are subjected to torture and intimidation. To mention a very sad incident reported by some Human Rights groups, an organ was removed from a female refugee, who was imprisoned in Misrata prison. The person was so sick, and she was taken to the hospital for medical treatment. After she was released from the hospital, she found a big scar on her body. Later doctors in Italy, where she was resettled, confirmed that a kidney was removed from her body. Another refugee died in prison when he refused to take medical treatment without the supervision of UNHCR. Since a UNHCR representative was not available at that time, the person died due to lack of medical treatment. These refugees do not have access to health care, welfare or other vital services even if they are released from the prison. Both Egyptian and Libyan governments do not offer refugee protection as it exists here in Canada. Rather, there are reliable reports that reveal the rights of these refugees are not respected. More troubling, there is little access to those who are still imprisoned in Egypt.

3. Risks of Deportation

These refugees are under great risk of deportation. The Egyptian government has already deported hundreds of refugees to Eritrea. In the aftermath of this regrettable act, the Libyan government attempted to deport Eritrean refugees, who are under its custody. In the month of July, it tried to deport them on the pretext of resettling them to Italy. There was a plan to subdue them by giving anesthesia by falsely telling them to take vaccination in order to go to Italy. Since the Eritrean refugees were aware of the trick, they contacted Human Rights Groups and managed to stop the deportation. As we all are well aware, the Libyan government deported a number of Eritrean refugees in 2004. The deportees were imprisoned, tortured and severely punished upon arrival.

4. The Response of the International Community in general and Canada in particular So Far

The United Nation High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and other human right organizations are monitoring the situation of these refugees very closely. The UNHCR have registered and recognized some of refugees in Libya by interviewing them in the prison. About 30 refugees, mostly women and children were resettled in Italy and other countries so far. Reliable sources reveal that UNHCR has asked countries like Canada to accept them.

According to the information we have,, the Canadian government has not yet responded to the call. Even though Canada has had a long tradition of opening its doors to refugees, it has not done enough to help these refugees. To mention one example, Canada granted refugee to a number of Kosovians during the 1996 – 1999 Kosovo crisis. We expect it act in a similar manner on issues of Eritrean refugees too. . Their condition is getting

worse day after day, and they could be deported any time if the international Community doesn't act on it swiftly. .

On the other hand, the refugees themselves are also trying in vain to gain the attention of the world. Last month, they staged a hunger strike and as a result, a number of them were seriously sick until a UNHCR representative intervened and advised them to halt their strike. We are very concerned about their condition, and we are asking you to take few minutes to help them.

5. What Is To Be Done?

We and other Eritrean and non Eritrean groups have been advocating on behalf of these refugees and calling the current Minister of Immigration and Citizenship to intervene in the matter and offer assistance to these refugees. The response that we have received so far is not encouraging to say the least. Therefore, we once again humbly request you to write to Hon. Minister Diane Finely and urge her to give the matter serious consideration.

6. What To Ask the Minister?

To help you, we have drafted a letter that you could send to the minister. You need to put your name at the beginning of the letter, your signature and address at the end of the letter. Please make sure you put the name and address of your Member of Parliament (the elected federal government official of your area) and send him/her a copy of the letter.)

7. Would The Minister Or Member of Parliament Care?

You must not underestimate the possible impact of this letter writing campaign. In particular, since we are in an election time, there is a better chance that Minister Diane Finely and your member of parliament will not disregard your letter. In particular, if you serious involve your member of parliament in this matter, it could influence the minister tremendously. The more noise we make, we have the better chance to be heard. After all, we should remember that we are tax payer citizens. The ministers as well as the members of parliament are elected to serve us. Above all, it is worth trying, and it will give us a peace of mind for doing something to help our brothers and sisters.

8. Where to Get the Address of the Member of Parliament?

I am sure you know your Member of Parliament or have received letters from Him/her. If not, you can find his or her address by calling 211 (if you live Toronto) or visiting the website; www.parl.gc.ca. You can find the name and contact information of your Member of Parliament by simply putting your postal code in the website.

9. Where to mail the letter?

Please cut the letter from the news paper and mail it to address of the Hon. Minister Finely and your member of parliament after putting your name, your address and your signature. Please note that members of parliament have two addresses – in Ottawa and your area. Try to mail the letter to both addresses in order to ensure that they receive it.

10. Do I take an action after?

It will be very advisable to call or do a follow up with your Member of Parliament and the minister and inquire if they have received your mail. Since they are extremely busy, contacting them a few days after you have mailed your letter is crucial. Your persistence and determination will bear fruit!

11. For more information,

Please contact Reverend Semere Sbhatu, Chair of Qalna Eritrea Human Rights Group, webmaster@qalna.com, www.qalna.com


Date:

The Honourable Diane Finley
 Citizenship and Immigration Canada
 Ottawa, Ontario
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 Email : Finley.D@parl.gc.ca, minister@cic.gc.ca.

APPROVED

Re: Eritrean Refugees in Libya and Egypt

Your Excellency,

I _____,  a Canadian citizen/ permanent resident would like to call your urgent attention to the desperate situation of Eritrean refugees, who are imprisoned in Libya and Egypt. A number of Eritrean refugees are facing great difficult and living in horrible conditions in the prisons of these two countries. Last summer, the government of Egypt deported a number of refugees, despite the plea of the Amnesty International, UNHCR, various organization and individuals. There are still a number of Eritrean refugees imprisoned in Egypt and at risk of being deported.

Similarly, there are approximately about 600 refugees imprisoned in Libya's Misrata prison and some of them have been there for years. A while ago, the Libyan government also deported a number of Eritrea refugees; and it could resort to similar act if there is not any solution to plight of these refugees.

So far, the United Nation High Commission for Refugees urged Canada and other countries to grant international protection including resettlement to these refugees However, the Canadian government has not responded to the call even though it responded to the refugee crisis of Kosovo swiftly.

Therefore, we are strongly urging you to intervene in this matter and :

1. exert international pressure on Egyptian and Libyan governments and urge them to:
 - a. stop deportation of Eritrean refugees immediately,
 - b. release imprisoned refugees,
 - c. give unhindered access to UNHCR;
2. offer resettlement possibility to Eritrean refugees in Libya and Egyptian prisons and detention centers and save their life; and
3. expedite private sponsorship applications that are submitted on the behalf of these refugees.

I am very affected by the gravity of the refugee crisis and unable to live in comfort while our brother and sisters are ill treated in Libya's and Egypt's prisons.

Please note that I have copied this letter to my Member of Parliament so that he or she could do a follow with you.

Sincerely,

Name:
 Address:

CC: Your Member of Parliament