



12.3.13

ERITREA | Diaspora Petitions U.S. Government on Human Rights

Members of the Eritrean diaspora have drafted a petition to the U.S. House and Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittees on African Affairs calling for greater attention to be paid to the continuing human rights crises in Eritrea.

The petition outlines a number of concerns, including violations of freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief, highlighting the case of Wehazit Berhane Debesai, a Christian woman who died of pneumonia in an unspecified prison in October 2013 after being denied medication following her refusal to renounce her faith. Forced labor and indefinite military conscription are also among the abuses outlined in the petition, along with the mass exodus of Eritrean youth, with the result that Eritrea is the largest refugee generating country on a capita basis.

The petition calls for a number of issues to be raised with the Eritrean government, based on specific recommendations, including the “immediate granting of unlimited and unhindered access to long-term detainees for the International Committee of the Red Cross”; “the implementation of Eritrea’s ratified constitution and the return of all rights enshrined within it, and an end to the indefinite extension of military service, and to “the use of military conscripts and detainees as forced labor.”

The recommendations also include a call for “access for relevant UN special mechanisms” to Eritrea to investigate the grave allegations of human rights violations in the country. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea has repeatedly been denied entry to the country. In her first "interactive dialogue" with the UN General Assembly on Oct. 24, she urged the Eritrean government to ensure that its people are able to "live in dignity" and challenge human rights violations "without the threat of reprisal".

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “It is encouraging that the manifold violations underway in Eritrea are gradually receiving much needed attention, and a human rights crisis that has deteriorated appallingly for over two decades now features in high-level international discussions, including in the UN General Assembly. However, in addition to highlighting this crisis, the international community must also formulate an effective means of addressing it. We therefore commend this important and timely initiative by the Eritrean diaspora in the US, which is designed to assist this process. CSW will continue to support all efforts to end human rights violations and ensure justice and the rule of law in Eritrea.”