



5.29.15

ERITREA | Protest Marks 13 Years of Church Crackdown

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) joined members of the Eritrean diaspora, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Release Eritrea, Human Rights Concern-Eritrea and Church in Chains Ireland in a protest vigil outside the Eritrean Embassy in London to mark the 13th anniversary of the imposition of severe restrictions on churches in Eritrea.

During the protest, Father Shenouda of the Eritrean Orthodox Church highlighted the government monitoring of churches and imprisonment of church leaders. The ordained patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Abune Antonios, was illegally deposed and has been under house arrest since 2006. Father Shenouda also spoke about the case of eight monks who were recently deported from the country and stressed that although the situation for Christians in Eritrea is grave, “as Christians we are children of the resurrected Lord and our hope is in Him.”

Eritrea is one of the world's most repressive regimes and the largest refugee-producing country on a per capita basis. Speakers from the participating organizations highlighted a number of human rights violations underway in the country, including indefinite military service and the arbitrary detention without charge or trial of thousands of Eritreans of all faiths and none.

Dr. Khataza Gondwe, CSW’s Team Leader for Africa and Middle East, highlighted how Eritrea’s severe mistreatment of its citizens has generated a refugee crisis, “According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, around 18% of the 200,000 people who reached Europe in 2014 were Eritreans who fled their country despite a governmental shoot-to-kill border policy, the risk of being held hostage by Bedouin people traffickers or being kidnapped from refugee camps in Sudan. Furthermore, they face the possibility of dying in the Sahara Desert or the Mediterranean Sea in unseaworthy vessels.”

In its interim report, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea noted that, “In Eritrea, detention is an ordinary fact of life, experienced by an inordinate number of individuals: men and women, old and young, including children.”

Selam Kidane of Release Eritrea made an appeal to the UN, AU and the EU, who have in recent months indicated they are working on various initiatives to engage the government of Eritrea, “Please listen to our plight. Listen to the plight of priests under arrest, the child refugees, the mothers who are losing one child after another to exile, imprisonment and death. Listen to the people of Eritrea. Uphold justice on their behalf.”

Near the end of the protest, a letter was delivered to the embassy by the leaders of the participating organizations.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are committed to standing in solidarity with the Eritrean people and will continue to press for justice until they are free. It is lamentable that after 23 years of independence Eritrea's people are yet to experience the extensive rights outlined in their progressive constitution, including the right to freedom of religion or belief. It is with heavy hearts that we mark 13 years since the crackdown on churches in Eritrea, but we will continue to pray and protest until change comes to the country and every prisoner of conscience is free."