

Africa's Cuba? What is Behind International Condemnation of Eritrea?

Global Research News Hour Episode 161

By [Michael Welch](#)

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [GLOBAL RESEARCH NEWS HOUR](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

"The crimes of enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, persecution, rape, murder and other inhumane acts have been committed, as part of a wide-spread and systematic campaign against the civilian population since 1991. The campaign has been aimed at maintaining control over the population and perpetuating the Eritrean leadership's rule."

– Mike Smith, Chairperson of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea [1]

"I tell people don't believe anything you read and almost nothing you see about Eritrea." – Thomas C Mountain [2]

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Optimism was high for Eritrea in the 1990s. [3]

Born of a people's three decades long struggle for independence from neighbouring Ethiopia, the country emerged amid hopes of a dynamic and egalitarian future. Dan Connell who has written numerous books and articles on Eritrea since the 1970s has commented on how the Eritrean peoples' resistance fostered popular participation in both the militant struggle and the three year constitution-building process that followed independence. Connell further claims the Eritrean liberation forces emerged from the war "with remarkably low levels of crime and corruption and an educated diaspora eager to help with reconstruction" ... along with a "commitment to political pluralism." [4]

The dream seemed to shatter less than a decade after independence. The liberation forces had morphed into the governing party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice, with military commander Isaias Afwerki serving as interim president. The government stands accused of shutting down the non-state press, jailing top government and party officials by the hundreds, and banning independent organizations. [5][6] The Eritrean Constitution, ratified in 1997 has yet to go into effect. There have been no national elections. [7]

More recently, a three person Commission of Inquiry, sponsored by the United Nations, has completed its [second report](#). The report authors claim that for two decades, the Afwerki government has been committing human rights violations amounting to crimes against humanity. These include extended national service, which they claim constitutes slavery, as well as forced disappearances, torture, and indefinite imprisonment without trial. [8]

[Human Rights Watch](#) and [Amnesty International](#) have echoed the concerns raised in the UN Commission of Inquiry. The NGO [Reporters without Borders](#) has listed Eritrea as dead last in the world with regard to press freedom.

PFDJ party officials try to justify actions, such as indefinite national service, as necessary in the face of threats of incursions from neighbouring Ethiopia. [9] Still others point out the larger instability in the region, instigated by major powers such as the United States, as demanding extraordinary actions in response.

This episode of the Global Research News Hour attempts to open up a dialogue about this neglected region by bringing in two long time observers with very different takes on the crisis and how it may be resolved.

Dr. Andebrhan Welde Giorgis is a veteran of Eritrea's War of Independence. He formerly held extensive senior positions including Eritrea's Ambassador to Belgium, DRC, the EU, France, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, the UK, and Permanent Representative to UNESCO and the IMO. He also served as Governor of the Bank of Eritrea and other positions. Now an exile, Dr. Giorgis currently serves as a Senior Mediation Specialist/Political Dialogue Facilitator at the European Centre for Electoral Support. He is author of 2014 book "[Eritrea at Crossroads: A Narrative of Triumph, Betrayal and Hope](#)."

Thomas C. Mountain is an independent journalist based in Asmara, Eritrea since 2006. He has authored a number of articles on Eritrea, including '[Eritrea: Africa's Cuba](#).' His articles appear at [Counterpunch](#), [Black Agenda Report](#) and other on-line news sites.

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Notes:

1. Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea – Press Conference (Geneva, 8 June 2016) ;
<http://webtv.un.org/watch/commission-of-inquiry-on-eritrea-press-conference-geneva-8-june-2016/4930296361001>
2. Interview with Phil Taylor on CIUT (July 4, 2016);
http://www.taylor-report.com/audio/mp3/Taylor_Report-2016-07-04.mp3
3. Valerie Frank (May 25, 2016), ‘Eritreans still denied freedom 25 years after independence’, The Guardian;
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/25/eritreans-denied-freedom-25-years-after-independence>
4. Dan Connell (August 27, 2011), ‘From resistance to governance: Eritrea’s trouble with transition’, Review of African Political Economy, published by Routledge;
<http://www.danconnell.net/sites/default/files/%20Eritrea%20in%20ROAPE%208.26.11.pdf>
5. ibid
6. Valerie Frank, Op. Cit.
7. http://www.theodora.com/wfbcurrent/eritrea/eritrea_government.html
8. Salem Solomon (October 31, 2016), ‘UN Commission of Inquiry Calls for Eritrean Leaders to Face Justice’, Voice of America;
<http://www.voanews.com/a/us-commission-of-inquiry-calls-for-eritrean-leaders-to-face-justice/3573102.html>
9. Dan Connell, Op. Cit.

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