

Peter Englund's Appeal for Dawit Isaak

Translation by Meron Estefanos

On November 19, Peter Englund's appeal for Dawit Isaak was published in 91 Swedish newspapers.

September 2001. What did you do? What did we do? I do not know what you did, but I just started working in my new job in Stockholm, and I remember that at that time I was struggling to get my life and my children's life in order, as I had just gotten divorced. In addition, we were probably all more or less preoccupied with what happened that Tuesday in New York when the towers came down. It not only feels like a long time ago. The work I left behind. It is now long gone and forgotten. I am now married and my boys have grown up and become men. Eight years is a long time.

In September 2001, the Swedish citizen Dawit Isaak was arrested in Eritrea. Throughout this time he has remained incarcerated in various prison hellholes, it is said to be over 300 of them in the country. Torture is very common in those hellholes; Dawit Isaak is one of the victims. Meanwhile, the prison system is brutal and ruthless. Some prisons are trapped in underground burrows, others in unventilated cargo containers, and some prisons are little more than death camps, where prisoners are dragged and never to return, they die, they do not return to be buried, they are just forgotten.

What had Dawit Isaak done in September 2001? Well, he was a journalist working for the country's largest newspaper, which reported on a group of fifteen cabinet members who demanded, among other things, democratic reforms. That was enough for his arrest. Until this day he has not been charged formally or given a fair trial. His crime was to speak freely. The principle of freedom of speech is build of; that every human being is born with a common sense that one has the right to decide over one's self and on the regime of the country that one lives in.

It is not the doubt, the questions or peoples different opinions that make a community weak, but the absence of doubt, questions and opinions, censorship brakes out the acid that dissolves over the very system it is supposed to protect. Eventually every dictatorship falls. At last all of them fall.

As the air is not something we think about, as long as it's there, it's easy to take freedom of speech for granted, if you never had to try out its opposite, as Dawit Isaak is paying its price. While freedom of speech is indivisible, the motto that individual never can expect one's self something as a man concurrent is ready to let someone else to stand without Freedom of speech or freedom itself.

It is now November 2009 and Dawit Isaak is still imprisoned. What do we do? What are you doing? Eight years is a long time.

Peter Englund