

**Joining EU and US policy towards Eritrea and the Horn of Africa
For the promotion of Democracy and Human Rights
Conference Concluding Statement
Brussels - Belgium
9-10 November 2009**

Europe External Policy Advisors (EEPA) in partnership with civil society leaders from the Horn of Africa and the Italian Institute for Political Science organized a two-day conference on EU and US policy on Eritrea and the Horn of Africa.

The Conference, held in Brussels on 9th and 10th November 2009, was attended by high-ranking officials and academics from Europe, the European Union, the United States, the Horn countries, Eritrean political leaders in diaspora, human rights activists and civil society leaders from across the Horn of Africa.

The Conference covered a wide range of issues, including:

- an overview of Eritrea's history in the Horn and the key regional concerns;
- analysis of EU and US policy approaches towards Eritrea and the Horn of Africa; the background to these approaches, aims and rationales ;
- human rights concerns in Eritrea and the region, in the understanding that states and the international community have an obligation to address these concerns;
- presentation of European Commission's policy in regard to human rights;
- Eritrean diaspora perspective for opening the country out of repression towards democracy and regional stability;
- the empowerment of Non State Actors in Eritrea and the Horn;
- the plight of refugees;
- the respect for the rights of ethnic and minority groups;
- respect for freedom of religion;
- identifying steps for greater democratic engagement in the Horn of Africa, the ways and means in which the international community can help in realizing this.

The Conference was opened by Dr Mirjam van Reisen, Director of Europe External Policy Advisors (EEPA), who welcomed the participants to the event, which she saw as an important platform for formulating coherent EU and US policies towards the Horn of Africa for the promotion of democracy and human rights. The Conference was also addressed by:

- Mr. Roger Moore, Director of Horn of Africa, European Commission, speaking for Karel de Gucht, EU Commissioner for Development Co-operation
- Mr. Robert Houdek, former U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia and Eritrea
- Mr. Kjell Magne Bondevik, former Prime Minister of Norway and President of the Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights
- Professor Bereket Habte Selassie, Distinguished Professor of African Studies and Professor of Law at the University of North Carolina and former Chair of the Constitutional Commission of Eritrea (represented in absentia)

The conference was informed on recent developments and noted the following observations with concern:

- that famine is spreading across the Horn of Africa and the lack of humanitarian support due to the politicization of aid delivery by some governments is worsening the crisis;
- the denial of food shortage by the Eritrean government and its refusal to accept humanitarian aid to alleviate the famine;
- that UNHCR reported that in 2008 the second highest absolute number of asylum seekers came from Eritrea with two thirds of new asylum-seekers claims lodged in Sudan and Ethiopia;
- that Somalia is facing its worst humanitarian crisis in 18 years. There is drought, record-high food prices and insecurity resulting in displacement.
- that half of Somalia's population (3.76 million) is in need of humanitarian assistance and that 75% of those in need are concentrated in South and Central Somalia where fighting is heaviest, thereby limiting civilians' access to emergency aid;
- that 1.5 million Somalis are living as IDPs in camps and another 500,000 are living as refugees in neighbouring countries;
- the violation of the arms embargo in Somalia by neighbouring states and its link with the instability and piracy in the region;
- the allegation that in Somalia war crimes and crimes against humanity are committed with impunity on a daily basis by the parties to the conflict;
- the allegation that Ethiopia is committing human rights violations against its citizens;
- the overall human rights violations in the region, excessive militarization and continued stalemate between Eritrea and Ethiopia on the border dispute;
- the common phenomenon of mass arrests and collective punishment affecting the whole population in Eritrea, including children, resulting from an arbitrary detention policy, the inhumane conditions, degrading treatment and torture of prisoners;
- the absence of a functioning parliament, democratic elections, and independent judiciary and the postponement of Constitutional democracy in Eritrea, blocking inclusive processes of change;
- the observation that organs of civil society are annihilated in Eritrea leading to the suppression of its potential role as agent of change in Eritrea, and the restriction of civil society in Ethiopia that especially target NGOs, freedom of speech and freedom of association;
- that Eritrea figures last on the World Press Freedom Index and is also reported as the most militarized state in the world.

The conference called for:

1. the unconditional implementation of the final and binding decision of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC);
2. the EU, the US and other members of the international community, such as China, to have a cohesive approach with regard to Eritrea and the Horn of Africa based on explicitly identified common goals and putting democracy and the promotion of human rights higher on the international agenda;
3. EU development aid to be implemented strictly in accordance with the Cotonou Agreement, with emphasis on the essential clauses on human rights;
4. EU development aid to be monitored and reviewed adequately and with the input of independent experts.

and recommended that:

- the EU and US to engage all countries of the Horn in a broader political dialogue with a more balanced approach and hold such countries accountable for human rights violations, where appropriate, including implementation of targeted sanctions against individuals;

- the EU and US to put effective pressure on the Eritrean authorities to release all political prisoners and respect human rights of Eritrean citizens and to ensure access by the ICRC and other independent monitoring groups;
- the EU and US to put effective pressure on all the authorities of the Horn to release all political prisoners and respect human rights of its citizens;
- Urge the UN to appoint international Commissions of Inquiry for Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia on their respective human rights situation;
- the EU and the US to engage with the AU and the international community in strategies to address the crisis of famine that is emerging in the Horn of Africa and to lift any obstacles that prevent UN agencies or humanitarian organizations in providing humanitarian assistance and food aid to the victims of the famine, in full recognition of the Code of Conduct on Humanitarian Assistance;
- the EU and the US to work with IGAD to promote regional economic cooperation and integration in the Horn; food security and environmental protection and the promotion and maintenance of peace and security and humanitarian affairs;
- the EU and US to actively promote the respect for civil society in Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia in accordance with the right to freedom of expression and the right to organise;
- the EU and the US to help the transition to democracy and respect for human rights in the Horn by investing in education and health facilities for refugees, youth, peace education, vocational training and employment programmes;
- the EU and the US to promote democratic transitions in the Horn countries by building on political and civil society initiatives in the diaspora communities, supporting especially refugee communities in neighbouring countries, especially involving youth being trained in peace building, education in democracy and encouraging participation in political organisations, and including them in vocational and academic education;
- that EU Member States, the US and the international community to follow the UNHCR guidelines on the "Return of Rejected Asylum Seekers to Eritrea" of January 2004 and respect their rights under the Refugee Convention and the review of the Italo-Lybia Agreement which is jeopardizing the lives of many asylum-seekers;
- that the EU Member States, the US and the international community resettle the asylum-seekers from the Horn of Africa who are stuck in Lybia as a consequence of the Italo-Lybian Agreement;
- supporting initiatives encouraging freedom of expression through television, radio and other communication initiatives;
- the institution of a process of transitional justice for Eritrea, including studying of a potential mandate for a tribunal preparing a process for transitional justice, reconciliation and healing.

References:

1. *The Economist* "A Catastrophe is Looming," 24 September 2009, available from http://www.economist.com/world/middleeast-africa/displayStory.cfm?story_id=14506436.
2. UNHCR 2008 *Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons*, available from <http://www.unhcr.org/4a375c426.html>
3. *Reuters* "Somalia: Humanitarian Situation 'Worst in 18 Years,'" 22 August 2009, available from <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/b3da5cdc4eb668102af3bbe841c3b01f.htm>.
4. *IRIN* "Somalia: Record Number of Displaced at 1.5 Million," 7 September 2009, available from <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=86034>; *CNN* "Somali Refugee Conditions 'Appalling,'" 4 September 2009, available from <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/africa/09/03/somalia.refugee.conditions/index.html>.
5. Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia Submitted in Accordance with Resolution 1811 (2008), UN Doc S/2008/769, 10 December 2008, available from <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/751/mongroup.shtml>, p 6, paras 66, 264.
6. "Human Rights Violations in War-torn Mogadishu," UNHCR/UNICEF press release, 9 June 2009.
7. Sally Healy and Martin Plaut "Ethiopia and Eritrea: Allergic to Persuasion," Chatham House, Briefing Paper, January 2007, AFP BP 07/01, available from http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/4055_bpethiopiaeritrea.pdf.
8. Human Rights Watch *Service for Life: State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea* (2009), available from http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/eritrea0409web_0.pdf.
9. Kjetil Tronvoll *The Lasting Struggle For Freedom In Eritrea: Human Rights and Political Development, 1991-2009* (The Oslo Center 2009).
10. Cotonou Task Force, *CTF Report JAR - MTR*, CRF Secretariat, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
11. Reporters Sans Frontières *Press Freedom Index 2009* (2009).
12. Bonn International Centre for Conversion (BICC) "Global Militarization Index (GMI)," available from http://www.bicc.de/uploads/pdf/publications/jahresbericht/2009/gmi_worldmap_2009.pdf (2009).