



Eritrean Refugees Detained in Egypt

Date: 31 July 2019

EMDHR received communication below from the Eritrean Refugee Community in Egypt.

EMDHR requests that the 5 detained Eritrean refugees who have committed no crime get released without further delay. Attached below is the letter written by the Eritrean refugee community in Egypt wanting their concerns to be addressed.

Eritrean Refugee community in Egypt
Cairo, Egypt
ericom2018@gmail.com

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

We need to let the world know and open its eyes that we Eritrean Refugees and Asylum seekers have repeatedly trying to condemn the UNHCR office in Egypt for it's not working according to its mandate. Nevertheless, we have not got any positive response in improving the frustrating situation that we are passing through; rather the office remains persistent in defending itself with meaningless justifications. To mention some from the many complaints that the Eritrean Refugees and Asylum seekers are suffering from the unjust and unfair overall Processes and Procedures followed by the office and sometimes may be by the state which we're not sure about: -

1. Registration

A) Delays and repetitive postponement of appointments for newly arrived asylum seekers for them to get registered only.

No proper applications of the basic principles and approaches of the UNHCR office with regards to this issue.

B) Instead of searching mechanisms by which the asylum seekers get served right away, unwanted delays have become a headache for the underage and unaccompanied Asylum seekers for they don't have an identity card.

C) UNHCR office doesn't provide with ID card (Yellow or Blue) to most underage and unaccompanied children; thus they don't receive any educational grants and financial assistance. And the consequence is that their lives have become very miserable beyond someone can imagine. Unwanted pregnancy, addiction to different drugs, homelessness and the likes have become very common and alarming which needs great care and attention to overcome.



D) It's well known that Eritrean Asylum seekers have become beneficial of the merge RSD process which merges the registration and the RSD interview only in Feb, 2018 while the asylum seekers of the other nationalities have started to benefit from the new approach a year ahead. This is one from the many acts that proves Eritrean Asylum seekers and refugees have become vulnerable to discrimination which is in opposition to Article 3 of the 1951 Refugee convention – Non-Discrimination as to race, religion or Country of Origin.

E) The UNHCR office doesn't regularly update its database with regards to the Eritreans who are registered and we see many Asylum seekers with their files remain active while in reality these individuals are non-existent in Egypt in anyways. Thus, this mystifying information the office is using could have negative impact in the succeeding steps of the processes and may hinder from accessing to certain services.

2. RSD (Refugee Status Determination):

Eritrean Asylum seekers awaiting refugee status decision from UNHCR have stick in a limbo beyond limit which anyone can't tolerate and has brought serious consequences for stability and wellbeing. (Delays to sit for RSD interview by receiving appointment extension SMS messages AND delays in receiving results when the Asylum seeker was lucky enough to sit for RSD). To mention some from the consequences:-

A) Life threatening journey through the Sahara Desert back to Sudan or Libya where a number of people are perished becomes the inevitable last desperate option for our Eritrean young fellows.

B) Mostly underage and single mothers are becoming the targets and victims of human traffickers.

C) The status of the asylum seekers remains undetermined for a long period of time and that led to uncertainty of the future of the claimants and their dependents for those with their family.

D) Following the late start of merge RSD process for Eritreans (only in Feb, 2018), many claimants frustrated by receiving new text message with extremely long period appointment extension instead of benefiting from the new strategy.

E) Despite the newly adopted system of interviewing for RSD; the appointment dates of many asylum seekers is prolonged and postponed 3 or 4 times. These delays are leading unexpectable psychological depressions. So unintentionally asylum seekers particularly are forcing to take risky decisions in their lives. As a result, they are exposed to a miserable life, like unwanted addictions, life threatening journey through Sahara to Sudan and Libya typically in a suicidal way.



3. Protection

A) Egypt has reservations in the 1951 refugee convention with regards to Articles 20, and 22-24, which guarantees the equal rights to refugees as nationals in terms of Primary Education, Labour, Social security and public relief. And these restrictions primarily affect the livelihood of Eritrean refugees as they limit the possibilities of being employed and access to basic Education.

B) Our socio-cultural differences with the people of the host country makes integration complicated and we have become victims of multiple abuses and violence as a consequence.

C) We do not have a clear way of approaching the legal institutions (the police and the court) when incidents happened. We're living in a state of anxiety as many of our fellows have been severely attacked in the heart of the capital city. No perpetrator has been brought to court of justice to be tried for his criminal acts which clearly show exercising Article 16 of the 1951 refugee convention – the right to access the court practically becomes easier said than done.

D) Unavailability of fundamental assistance (financial and security issues) from the UNHCR and its partners exposes most Eritrean asylum seekers and refugees to stay and live together in large number congested in a small living room regardless of our gender differences.

E) As there is no ground where we can work legally which is against Articles 17 – 19 of the 1951 refugee convention, we are forced to engage in any kind of job as house maid, cleaner and so on to become a breadwinner. But we are unfortunate that we have become victims of different levels of violations and exploitations by our employers. There's no way that we can bring the perpetrators to court of justice because simply the work is illegal.

F) It's fair to say that the UNHCR hotline is not functioning at all. Especially in case of emergencies there should have a different way which we can approach the office. Usually communication fails and we remain simply wasting our time and money without getting through.

G) Getting residence permit from the Immigration office is very complicated and our safety is compromised when we are required to line-up at night. As these procedures are repetitive for many times, the risk of the Asylum seekers and refugees falling in danger is inevitable.

H) No lawyer is hired by the UNHCR office to its clients for them to assist in overall livelihoods in the host society particularly with protection issues.

I) A number of Eritreans have been imprisoned and expelled when they arrive Egypt especially in the borders accusing that they have crossed the territories illegally which is contrary to Articles 31 and 32 of the 1951 refugee convention – the right not to be punished for illegal entry into the territory of a contracting state and the right not to be expelled, except under certain, strictly defined conditions.



J) Are there specified places that UNHCR in Egypt provide services assistances or not? Because under any circumstances when some emergency accidents out of Cairo happened, and refugees inform for an accurate support or follow ups from UNHCR the only feedback they receive is that the UNHCR haven't any service/assistance coverage of the victim's current presence. So how would UNHCR assign and demonstrate refugees right? As the organization stands for the behalf of refugees and asylum seekers there is no financial and supplementary feeding support service deliverance. As far as we don't have residence permit to work, we are forced to face numerous constrains on our livelihood.

4. RST (Resettlement)

A) The UNHCR, Embassies and IOM facilitate the limited cases with protection needs for resettlement to third countries. However it's very sad to hear that the cases of some of our citizens are hijacked within the three above mentioned facilitating organizations when it reached in its final stage.

B) After RST interview is made, Eritrean refugees are forced to wait for a prolonged period time before they receive their results which is also main cause of frustration to many.

C) It is well known that education is the fundamental basis of one community's development especially when the right curriculum is designed to fit the community. However, we are not only suffering from the discrepancies of the host country's curriculum but also, we don't have enough education opportunity. As the result of this we are losing the aptitude to study and will impact negatively to our lives when we get resettled to a third country.

5. Social Welfare

A) When Asylum seekers arrive in the soil of Egypt and approaches the UNHCR for the first time, there is no fundamental assistance provided to them as simple as food and drinking water even for the first day of their arrival.

B) The financial assistance provided by the UNHCR and its partners is unfair and with lots of partiality in spite of its very limited amount.

C) Despite the fact that any refugee has no right to work, children are denied from getting any financial assistance only because they have not lost at least one of their parents; very sad.

D) In a very rare occasions when UNHCR distributes certain limited amount of money to refugees (for example weathering assistance, 2017), we have seen significant number of refugees and Asylum seekers remained inaccessible to get any. There was no way to complain how the office followed its allocation.

E) According to WFP's unclear and unconceivable procedures, those who need it are not getting sufficient assistance.



Caution: - It's not a mystery that most of the UNHCR office staffs are locals and it's almost impossible for refugees or asylum seekers to have direct access to contact and discuss their issues with the very insignificant number of the international staff. And rejection to all our complaints is expected from the National staffs may be thinking to protect the values of their society especially for cases related to protection. Therefore it's high time to call the concerned bodies to investigate the matter as what extent these staffs have impacted all the burdens mentioned above to happen.

In conclusion, it's worth mentioning Napoleon's quote as once said "The world suffers a lot; Not because of the violence of bad people But because of the silence of good people".

The world in general and the UNHCR may not be in a position to change the mind of the bad people and you may not be able to punish the perpetrators in anyways. But as a good entity or people, you can protect the victims by approaching different practical strategies that really brings differences on the ground. We can confidently and with tangible evidence accuse the UNHCR office for it's not guaranteeing the fundamental human rights of Eritrean refugees and Asylum seekers.

Apart from the Articles that Egypt has made reservations in the 1951 Refugee convention which literally creates legal barriers that alienate the refugees and asylum seekers communities from getting fundamental aids and assistances, we are being exposed to multiple levels of harassments and violations regularly which violate the right of freedom of movement.

Since the dreadfulness of the lives of Eritrean refugees and Asylum seekers here in Egypt is not controversial, it's worth reminding concerned bodies that the possibilities of evacuating these vulnerable refugees and Asylum seekers to other potential host countries where the basic human rights are respected seems inevitable and should be done shortly instead of leaving us in a regretful and meaningless life. It's in the hand of the UNHCR to make or break the future of ours and our children.

Thank you!

The Eritrean Refugee community in Egypt, Cairo July 21 2019