

Event by the Eritrean (Young) People's Front for Democracy and Justice glorifying violence and hatred cancelled in Rijswijk

EEPA, 11 August 2022

Cultural event by Eritrean long arm in Event Plaza Rijswijk in the Netherlands

A 'cultural' event organised by the long arm of the Eritrean regime, the (Y)PFDJ, has been organised at the Event Plaza in Rijswijk, the Netherlands for 13 August 2022.

The People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) and its youth-wing, YPFDJ, is the political organisation that controls Eritrea and has a granular presence abroad to control the Eritrean diaspora. It is referred to as HEGDEF or HGDEF by members of the Eritrean diaspora, or Shabia, mostly used to refer to its presence in Eritrea.

Many organisations, including the Foundation Human Rights for Eritreans, have urgently asked the PFDJ, Event Plaza and the municipality of Rijswijk that the event be cancelled.

The 'cultural' events, organised by an organisation that is understood to be associated with the (Y)PFDJ, are regular events in which the diaspora is invited and expected to participate.

An event to glorify violence and hate against the people of Tigray

Members of the Eritrean community report that during these events the long arm of the regime **collects intelligence of who is loyal to the regime and who is not**. It is also reported that funds collected from the diaspora at such events are used to support the regime.

It is alleged that the funds collected at the event could or would be used to contribute to the war efforts in the region, especially against the regional state of Tigray in Ethiopia.

According to a leaked copy of a zoom meeting it is known that a representative of the Eritrean regime and events organiser, Mr. Sirak Bahlbi, encouraged Eritreans in the diaspora

to engage in fundraising activities to support the ongoing war in Northern Ethiopia:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKGuhfaC3t0> (January 4, 2022, 25th minute mark).

The "cultural" aspect of the event is seen by members of the Eritrean and Tigray community as the front of a **message of hate**, especially against the people of Tigray, and a glorification of violence.

The conference poster for the event, shows the Eritrean singer **Awel Seid**. The poster shows the well known singer from Eritrea in military uniform and with the Eritrean national flag. The way the Eritrean and Tigray community understand **his lyrics is that these dehumanise Tigrayans, incite hatred and glorify military action** in the region and especially against Tigray.

The Tigray region, which neighbours Eritrea and is a regional state of the federal state of Ethiopia, was invaded by Eritrea in November 2020.

The forced indefinite national service, also qualified as ‘slavery’, was providing the main capacity for the invasion of Tigray by Eritrea in 2020.



Texts of Awel Seid are expressed in poems and speeches. In a description of his declamations he is described as:

The last, Awel Seid, sounds to me like the voice of a judge, from a medieval era. A judge reading, in a booming voice, the counts against HISTORY and ordering history, with hand gestures, to comply with the PFDJ NARRATIVE pronto, as was foretold in days of old (“Awet nHafash!”) Resistance is futile, and compliance is inevitable, so sooner is better than later, is always Awel’s judgement. The PFDJ NARRATIVE is the ERITREAN NARRATIVE, and dissent is just another word for treason. There are a rotating cast of characters in the Enemies of the State gallery who populate his videos, and in the most recent edition, I showed up. (Saay Storm, Enter the Judge, Exit the Veterans. Eritrean Digest. 3 January 2022, <https://www.eritreadigest.com/enter-the-judge-exit-the-veterans/>).

The tone of his messages support the Eritrean regime's invasion of Tigray, with implicit messaging, since the Eritrean authorities long denied the invasion in Tigray:

Awel Said, the new voice of Eritrea's Indignation At The World, has only one voice: triumphant bitterness. What exactly will kids approach Awel Said with? Fist raising? Will they just exchange knowing smiles about a victory, specifically Tribe of Eritrea's triumph over the Tribe of Tigray but they have to do it in hush tones since the Tribe of Eritrea, officially, never fought in Tigray? (Saay Storm, Enter the Judge, Exit the Veterans. Eritrean Digest. 3 January 2022, <https://www.eritreadigest.com/enter-the-judge-exit-the-veterans/>).

According to the diasporas from Eritrea and Tigray, messages of Awel Seid glorify violence and they are full of allusion to the Russian invasion in Ukraine, serving as a justification for the invasion by Eritrea in Tigray. A listing of interpretations of Awel Seid's messages includes the following:

- *Endorsement of violence, war, hate, aggression, invasion, a language of dehumanisation, etc are the hallmarks of his songs and poems:*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKSNe-6YYwc>
- *In one clip he empathetically supports the Russian invasion of Ukraine and praises the regime's alliance with Russia including its vote at the UN Council (start at 28:00 min mark). Mr. Seid's visit to Scandinavian countries must also be seen as an extension and endorsement of the regime's geopolitical alignment with Russia. This must be seen in the context of propagating Russian propaganda within the Swedish community of Eritrean descent:*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ej1hghWx4LM>
- *In a video he shows no regard to human decency, and he approves civilian killings including by using very graphic images (4:50 minute mark). He vehemently romanticised war and violence:*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfwXZPKnz6w>

- *In a musical poem he is heard to dehumanise Tigrayans and to glorify the war in Tigray and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which is also reinforced through the strong use of imagery in his videos. He has interwoven diaspora born Eritreans' TikTok clips (12:58-13:27 minute mark) into his propaganda message: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Y9w-716xoc>*
- *Another song endorses and praises the indefinite Eritrean youth national military service that has been one of the main causes of Eritrean youth out migration: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiDT23nqJJ8> (Message received 9 August 2022)*

A similar opinion is expressed by an expert of the region who argues on Awel Seid:

This is an ardent supporter of Sha'ebiya (..) trying to boost the moral of his followers through praise of the "invincible" Eritreans. He refers to Tigrayans as historic enemies and warns Eritreans not to listen to call of fraternity from 'across the Mereb River.' The comment was provided in response to a clip that shows [Awel Seid on Eritrean festival Sweden](#) (Message received Monday 8 August 2022)

The expert equally finds that the message of Awel Seid is a message of violence:

I think it is worth adding details. It is an ideologically elaborate call for systematic hate against Tigrayans. There are three main messages, he says:

1. They, the Tegar (Tigrayans), are inherently evil, they have three plans a, b, and c to destroy you (Eritreans)

2. You (Eritreans) are human/high level human, them ('nisom kem seb' -> literally: they are as human) - meaning: they act/look as if they are humans but are not as you (Eritreans) real human.

3. You (Eritreans) must be without shame and be proud to fight them not only over 30 years but 100 and even 3000 years with this evil/not human. (Comment by expert received on Monday 8 August 2022)

According to another expert, the texts have the intention to normalise violence against the Tigray people, by glorifying the Indefinite National Service in Eritrea. The military are trained in a camp called Sawa. The expert finds:

“Awel in praise of Sawa. This video contains clips of Tigrayans reporting rape and killings by Eritreans. My understanding of it is that these crimes are minimised. There is reference to the Warsay as both Christians and Moslem and to the crimes committed by the Ethiopian forces in Eritrea during the border War in the video these forces are referred to as Woyane deliberately miss describing the nature of the forces. Sacrifice, nationalism central to the message” (referring to <https://youtu.be/dfwXZPKnz6w>).

The Border War was fought between Eritrea and Ethiopia between 1998 and 2000.

The UN has classified **the indefinite national service which begins in the military training camp of Sawa, in Eritrea, as a crime against humanity**. Depicting the military supported with the text, the poster would appear to glorify the national service in Eritrea. The indefinite national service in Eritrea is widely seen as one of the main reasons for the high number of refugees from the country and a reason why youth from Eritrea attempts to cross over the Mediterranean Sea to Europe- a very dangerous journey in which many lose their life.

AWEL SEID
 አወል ሰዲድ ጉዕዞ ናብ ሆላንድ
 13 Augustus 2022
 EVENT PALAZA RIJSWIJK
 LANGE KLEIWEG 86. 2288 RIJSWIJK

ከዛርብ-ናጥም ደልፋዎ፣ ዲያስፖራ፣ ሻብያ፣ ናይ ሕግመይ፣ ይህክል፣ ዋና ባሕሪ፣ ዋርዕይ።

Awel Sied Op reis naar Holland

Ze dwingen ons om te praten, Diaspora, Shabiya (EPLF-Eritrean Regime), Jongere lui, Enough, Eigenaar van de zee, Jongeren in het Leger

Vertaling:
 Richting, USA, Europa, Eritrean dissident

AWEL SEID አወል ሰዲድ
 Tijd : 18:00 – 01:00
 INTREE : Boven 18 € 30
 15 t/m 17 jaar € 20
 (ID VERPLICHT)

(Poster with Translation of Tigrinya language on the poster to Dutch)

Awel Seid seems to be making a tour in Europe to muster support for the Eritrean regime and he has already performed in Sweden: [Awel Seid on Eritrean Festival Sweden](#). While the event generated a lot of protest and was cancelled at the event venue, Awel Seid still performed hate speech while in the country.

Awel Seid's texts are strongly pro Russia and also anti-America:

Awel Seid is a PFDJ poet. Journalist Sajid (my way youtube) describes the presentation by the poet during the Eritrean Swedish festival as a political speech.

It is a political speech and precisely it is a Charge D'Affair Steve Walker and more generally a USA bashing exercise, listing all the conflicts the USA has and is involved in and generally blaming all of the problems of Africa on the USA.
https://twitter.com/AmanuelERII/status/1554161053759586304?t=yff8GsWt2Xd3JJ2nyZvd_w&s=08

Pictures used in messages to promote the war with Tigray depict Awel Seid and other actors and further underscore the military glorification that he promotes:

The images are taken from programs at the front in the borders of Eritrea and Tigray with the group of Singers and Film Makers doing war propaganda. Awel Seid and the team "Walta" are seen there. (Message received 11 August 2022).

Walta is understood to be a cultural group of the Ministry of Defence in Eritrea (Message 11 August 2022). Pictures are understood to be taken at the frontline and in Sawa. This is a production of the Walta group: https://youtu.be/_Vb7yqFopBA

Following pictures are depicting the production of the Walta group:



(1 Figure on the right is Awel Said)



(2 Awel Seid with Meleake Rezene Alem (Proud Eritrean) and Meleake)



(3 Awel Seid (left) with one of the commanders at the frontline)



(4 Rezene Alem (ሱራይ) (military figure with the microphone))

Pictures with Awel Seid taken at the front and in Sawa, with the cultural group Walta of the Ministry of Defense and of Cultural Affairs in Eritrea, according to members of the diaspora who sent these, the pictures glorify the militarisation of Eritrea and its war with Tigray (Ethiopia).

The texts relate (among others) to Eritrean proverbs which need intimate understanding of the language and the context of these. Commenting on the pictures a member of the Eritrean diaspora states:

The main message of pictures is always standing with Eritrean forces and give encourage Picture describes as encouragement take action against Tigray (Message 11 August 2022)

As a viewer of these images, we are asked to look up at the military performance, providing sentiments of **power, strength and force**.

Letters by Eritrean Diaspora Movements

Eritrean diaspora organisations have protested the event.

For instance, the Eritrea Bright Future Movement wrote to the Mayor of Rijswijk to express concern over the event. Awel Seid is a leader of a “military music band”, they state:

For this 'cultural festival', a military music group has been invited, Walta (which means 'dagger'), whose leader (Awal Said) is guilty of, among other things, writing very rude threatening lyrics against Eritrean dissidents and Tigrayans: for example, 'Tigrayans should be wiped off the face of the earth'. He chanted this last month in Sweden, among other places, and the venue's landlord cancelled the rental. (<https://www.eepa.be/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Brief-naar-de-burgmeester-Rijswijk-2.pdf>)

It also denounces this event **as an insult to the democracy** of the Netherlands:

The festival is a serious attack on the democratic society of the Netherlands. The seriously radicalised supporters of the regime will see this as confirmation that they have a free hand in the Netherlands and can seriously threaten people in the diaspora without any consequences. (<https://www.eepa.be/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Brief-naar-de-burgmeester-Rijswijk-2.pdf>)

The movement urged the mayor to cancel this event. The full letter from the Eritrea Bright Future Movement can be found [here](#).

The Foundation for Human Rights also sent a letter to the mayor of Rijswijk, expressing concern about the event. The Foundation says that the event is being:

organised by the long arm of the Eritrean regime (of the political party PFDJ) under the control of the security and intelligence services, with a military character. (<https://www.eepa.be/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Eritrea-Festival-Rijswijk-2022-FIN03082022.pdf>)

The Foundation denounces the fact that the work of Awel Seid **constitutes hate speech and incites genocidal violence:**

Awel Seid's texts, in his poems and speeches, aim to create an atmosphere in which genocidal intentions are (or can be) normalised. His expressions are described as 'hate speech' and are inadmissible in the Netherlands. Although freedom of expression exists in principle in the Netherlands, it does not protect expressions that incite genocidal violence.

<https://www.eepa.be/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Eritrea-Festival-Rijswijk-2022-FIN03082022.pdf>

The foundation finds that Awel Seid

was sent by the highest military security authorities in Eritrea and is supported by the intelligence services.
<https://www.eepa.be/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Eritrea-Festival-Rijswijk-2022-FIN03082022.pdf>

The full letter by the Foundation is available [here](#).

A Letter of Summons addressed to the PFDJ sent by the Foundation Human Rights for Eritreans

Through its lawyer, the Foundation Human Rights for Eritreans sent a letter to the consul of Eritrea in The Netherlands requesting that the (Y)PFDJ cancels the event immediately and urgently. In its letter, **they find that the event is political rather than cultural,**

The event is billed as a ‘cultural’ event. However, the event is in fact aimed at (1) illegally collecting ‘tax’ from Eritreans in the diaspora and (2) at spreading political propaganda which qualifies as hate speech.
<https://eritreahub.org/urgent-call-to-eritrean-embassy-to-cancel-pfdj-festival-or-face-legal-sanctions>

The Foundation also expressed concern about this type of event, which the Foundation states is **used to monitor the Eritrean diaspora** in the country and around the world, and is used to observe who is loyal to the regime and who is not, while forcing financial contributions that will contribute to the Tigray war.

What is more, it is highly likely that the fundraising at this event will go towards financing the involvement of the Eritrean State in the war in Tigray. It has been widely and convincingly documented that the Eritrean State is responsible for grave violations of human rights during this war, including the use of rape as a weapon of war and extrajudicial massacres of civilians.

<https://eritreahub.org/urgent-call-to-eritrean-embassy-to-cancel-pfdj-festival-or-face-legal-sanctions>

The full letter of the lawyer can be found [here](#). Copies of the letter were also sent to Event Plaza and the Municipality of Rijswijk.

Police points the public to a special telephone line



The screenshot shows the top part of a Dutch Police reporting form. It features a navigation menu with a hamburger icon, the 'POLITIE' logo, and a search icon. Below the header, there is a section titled 'Aangifte of melding doen' and a sub-section 'Meldformulier'. The text in this section reads: 'Denkt u dat de situatie gevaar oplevert, bel dan 112. Is dat niet zo, meld het dan hier.' followed by 'Uw melding is verstuurd en wordt door de politie in behandeling genomen. Het kan zijn dat contact met u wordt opgenomen voor aanvullende informatie. Of om u te adviseren alsnog aangifte te doen.' and 'Is het gewenst dat de politie direct of zo spoedig mogelijk ter plaatse komt, aarzel dan niet en bel alsnog: 112 als elke seconde telt.'

As a result, mobilisation in The Netherlands has become widespread. The Dutch Eritrean democratic opposition started to look at all the other potential venues for this event and possible future ones, and the **Eritrean community reported en masse to the police that they felt threatened by such events.**

In addition, the police have shared a reporting form for anyone who would like to report the event or the telephone number 0900 8844. The police requested the public **to report any threat related to this event or any other event that causes concern in the Eritrean and Tigray communities** using the reporting form.



The screenshot shows the top part of a Dutch Police reporting form for terrorism. It features a navigation menu with a hamburger icon, the 'POLITIE' logo, and a search icon. Below the header, there is a section titled 'Aangifte of melding doen' and a sub-section 'Meldformulier terrorisme'. The text in this section reads: 'Denkt u dat de situatie gevaar oplevert, bel dan 112.' followed by 'Vult u het meldingsformulier zo volledig mogelijk in. Zonder deze gegevens heeft de politie onvoldoende informatie om uw melding in behandeling te kunnen nemen. Uw gegevens worden vertrouwelijk behandeld. Het kan zijn dat de politie contact met u opneemt voor aanvullende informatie. Of om u te adviseren alsnog aangifte te doen.' and 'Let op! Ga nooit zelf op zoek. Want als u in bezit bent van bijvoorbeeld filmpjes of teksten met betrekking tot terrorisme, bent u mogelijk strafbaar. Wel kunt u aangeven of u gegevens beschikbaar kunt stellen, zoals informatie over WhatsApp-gebruikers of over Facebook- en Twittersprekken, URL's, IP-adressen met datum, tijdstippen etc.'

At the bottom, there are three buttons: '1. Mijn melding' (highlighted), '2. Mijn gegevens', and '3. Controleren', followed by a checkmark icon.

Members of the diaspora have shared the information on twitter.

See also the article [here](#).

Event cancelled for administrative and security reasons

The Municipality of Rijswijk has subsequently communicated to Eritrean democracy and human rights representatives that **the event will not take place**. A notification of the event

would have been required by the municipality, but according to the municipality this notification was not received. After checks and talks with the police and the municipality it turned out the required safety measures for the event had not been organized (again according to the municipality). Members of the diaspora announced:



(Screenshots of information by Rijswijk Municipality of the cancellation of the event in Event Plaza)

The scheduled Shaabia/PFDJ Festival in the Netherlands on 13/08/2022 has been cancelled due to security reasons. Please protect our area from clandestine activities and call the police if you see any gatherings!! (Translated from Tigrigna).

According to diaspora organisations, it would appear that the event was organised under the organisation Stichting Nederlands Eritrees Platform (SNEP) registered under the Commerce of Trade number 67272789.

These events are regularly held and attended by representatives of the Eritrean regime at the highest level. Yemane Gebreab, Head of Political Affairs at the PFDJ and Presidential Advisor had participated at last year's festival. (Eritrean community festival in Scandinavian countries).

The threat expressed by the members of the diaspora is that these events are used to spy on them.

A picture in which Awel Seid is depicted with the Eritrean strongman Isayas Afwerki, who rules the countries for decades and has absolute power, seems to underscore his closeness to the dictator. According to information received Awel Seid received a “G plus 1 building” by the President, as a means of ensuring his loyalty.

According to another expert, this is normal practice at the top of the regime:

This is a normal practice. Generals have also received houses in Asmara (around Tiravolo and CampoPolo) that used to belong to Italians. The Secretary of PFDJ received land in Massawa and he built his villa there. A relative of mine in Eritrea also lost her house in Massawa and now at the site there is a Palace that belongs to a senior PFDJ person. On the way to Hamasien Beach there used to be a villa that belonged to an Eritrean Italian who was told to hand over the house because the Government needed it. (Message received 10 August 2022).

ኢሰያስ ብዓል ጸቢብ ርእሲ ንእውል ሲዒድ መኻፈልቲ ግበን
ሂቡ ባርያ ከም ዝቐየር ኑፈልጡ ዶ ገዛ ግራውንድ ፕላስ ዋን
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Eritrea's involvement in the Tigray war has resulted in sanctions by the US Presidential Executive Order (E.O.) 14046: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0478>. International sanctions include the National Security Agency under Abraha Kassa in Eritrea.

Different posters

The event was announced in two different posters, which were apparently used to communicate with different audiences. One poster of the same event just shows the event as a cultural event only.



Event announced in Germany

The event is also announced in Germany. In Germany also two different posters are used to announce the event. The event is announced for 20 August 2022, and a link to the event is available here: <http://dehai.org/dehai/events>

The same two posters are used for this event. The second poster does not depict Awel Seid.



Links of interests:

[Letter from the Foundation Human Rights for Eritrean](#)

[Urgent call to Eritrean Embassy to cancel PFDJ Festival – or face legal sanctions](#)

[Awel Seid clip - Violence, war, hate, etc. as hallmarks of songs and poems](#)

[Awel Seid clip - Support of Russian invasion of Ukraine](#)

[Awel Seid clip - Approval of civilian killings](#)

[Awel Seid clip - Glorification of Tigray war](#)

[Awel Seid clip - Glorification of the Eritrean national service](#)

Treasury Sanctions Four Entities and Two Individuals in Connection with the Crisis

[Leaked zoom meeting of the regime’s Charge d’Affairs, Mr. Sirak Bahlbi](#)

[Beyene Gebrezgabehar - Festival cancelled](#)

[Politie - Meldformulier terrorisme](#)

[Dutch police call for information about intimidation at PFDJ Festival – under terrorism law](#)

[Enter the judge, exit the veterans](#)

[Twitter: Amanuel ERI - PFDJ festival faces resistance](#)

[Twitter: Amanuel ERI - Festival stopped for security reasons](#)

[Twitter: Amanuel ERI - Awel Seid's speech with subtitles](#)

For more information on the event that took place in Sweden, the following links are available:

- [Eritreansk kulturfestival avbokad efter kritik](#)
- [Eritrea's ruling party's Stockholm festival plans terminated! How it was done](#)
- [Inte konstigt att Eritrea har rätt att försvara sig](#)