

Statement of Martin Plaut, Senior Researcher, University of London

Closing Statement

European Parliament Roundtable on Eritrea

25 October 2023

Round Table summary by Martin Plaut, Senior Researcher, University of London

I would like to thank MEP Langensiepen and the European External Programme with Africa for holding this important Round Table which comes at such a critical moment.

I would like to thank everyone for their observations, but particularly the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Eritrea, Dr Babiker. His careful sifting of the evidence is enormously helpful.

I will highlight two of his points.

First, the huge exodus of Eritreans which can be seen across the world. This is continuing, despite the terrible dangers they face. These were underlined this week by the Report of the UN Panel of Experts to the Security Council. [S/2023/673]

This provided – in great detail – the involvement of Libyan state and para-statal actors in human trafficking, smuggling and enslavement. The key actors are named and the roles explained.

I quote just one section, underlining the impact on European Union states.

“The Panel identified eight human trafficking and migrant smuggling routes in Libya. Those routes are operated by Libyan networks of human traffickers and smugglers with international and regional elements in 17 countries, including France, Germany and Italy...

Victims were constantly subjected to acts of enslavement, rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, deliberate starvation and torture, as well as cruel and extremely degrading treatment.

The Panel found that these human rights abuses were committed in the course of organized criminal operations. These private trafficking networks were operated in collaboration with Libyan armed groups and used well-developed illegal enterprises

in Libya and abroad with the aim of generating significant financial profits and other benefits for these actors.”

Secondly, what Dr Babiker refers to as “the long arm of the regime.” The intelligence activities and interference of the Eritrean government with the lives of their citizens in exile.

These activities across Europe are particularly important. But the Eritrean diaspora are now challenging this “long arm of the regime” wherever they find it.

There have been demonstrations and protests from Israel to Canada, and in many European states including Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Norway.

The Dutch are aware of these activities and has already taken some steps to counter them. The Norwegian government commissioned an important and insightful report on “Transnational Repression” by foreign powers against diaspora communities.

The European Union has access to all this information.

What we now need is action both to prevent the enslavement of Eritreans in Libya and to tackle the “long arm” of the Eritrean regime.

Thank you.

For information

The report to the UN Security Council is S/2023/673 dated 15 September 2023

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4022306?ln=en>

The Norwegian report: “Transnational repression: data advances, comparisons, and challenges”

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2474736X.2022.2104651>

The Dutch report: The 2% Tax for Eritreans in the diaspora

<https://raee.eu/the-2-tax-for-eritreans-in-the-diaspora-facts-figures-and-experiences-in-seven-european-countries-september-2017/>