



10 June 2016

PRESS STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

SADC Council of NGOs calls on the African Union to act decisively on Human Rights Violations in Eritrea

The release of a damning report on human rights violations in Eritrea by the Commission of Inquiry On Human Rights in Eritrea (COI-E) under the auspices of the UN Human Rights Commission affirms SADC CNGO's long standing concern about the Eritrean government's deep rooted and ever-escalating violations of human rights against its citizens. Over the time we have noted reports out of Eritrea of torture, assassinations and enslavement of citizens without recourse to the rule of law. SADC CNGO believes that the totality of these barbaric acts constitute extreme forms of crimes against humanity and thus the continued silence of the African Union and the African leadership in particular on the suffering of the Eritrean people raises profound concerns on the protection of human rights under the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights.

Established by the Human Rights Council Resolution 26/24 of 27th of June 2014, the COI-E released its first report in June 2015 (A/HRC/29/42) in which it ascertained the existence of "systematic and widespread human rights violations committed by the Eritrean government". The report was adopted by the UN Human Rights Commission, which resolved to extend the mandate of the COI-E for another twelve months. After twelve months the COI-E released its report in which it unequivocally concluded that:

"[it] has a reasonable ground to believe that crimes against humanity, namely, enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, other inhumane acts, persecutions, rape and murder, have been committed in Eritrea since 1991."

On this basis, the COI-E recommended, among other things, that the UN Security Council "determine(s) that the situation of human rights in Eritrea poses a threat to international peace and security" and that the African Union "establishe[s] an accountability mechanism, under the aegis of the African Union and supported by the international community, to investigate, prosecute and try individuals reasonably believed to have committed crimes against humanity"

Against this background and reiterating the resolutions of the 10th Southern Africa Civil Society Forum in July 2014 in Harare, Zimbabwe, and the 6th Citizens' Continental Conference held on 21-23 January 2016 in Addis Ababa, SADC CNGO calls upon the African Union to expeditiously put the human rights situation in Eritrea on its agenda and establish accountability mechanisms as recommended by the COI-E.

We are once again calling upon the African Union to act decisively and fearlessly to protect the lives of defenseless men, women and children in Eritrea against their authoritarian government. For our attainment of the aspirations of Agenda 2063 and the principle of "African solutions to African problems", the African Union must not fail the people of Eritrea yet again and thus must urgently act on the recommendations of the Commission's report.

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