

International Aid in Eritrea: Complicity with Forced Labour, Enslavement and Crimes against Humanity

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Eritrea

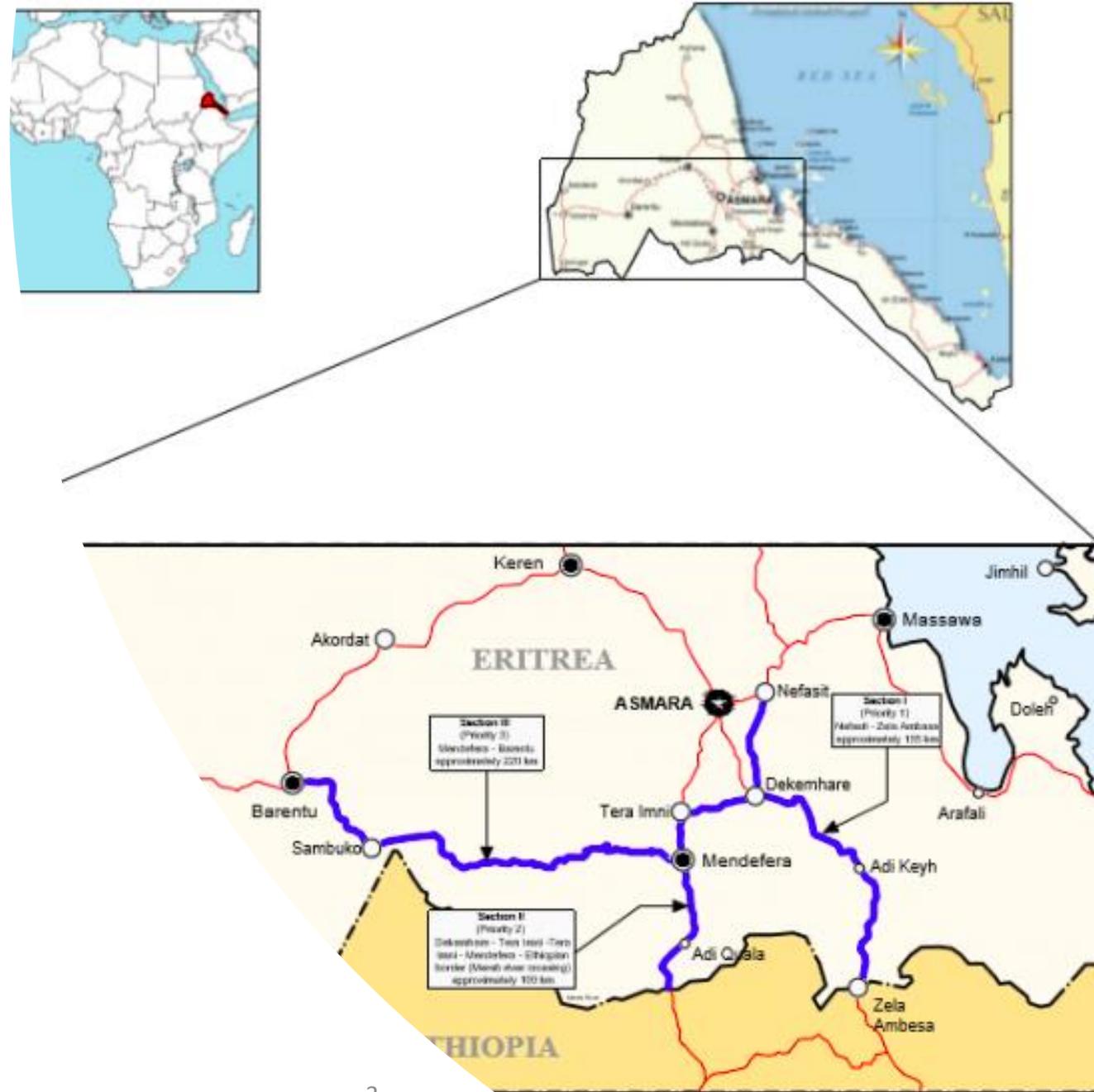
- 4 million inhabitants
- 5000 refugees per month (UN)
- 300 refugees per day to Ethiopia (current situation)



EU Project

€20 project Reconnecting Eritrea and Ethiopia Through Rehabilitation of the Main Arterial Roads to Eritrea is to be implemented through :

- Government companies – Red Sea Trading Company
- National Service labour



EU Funding

2015

allocation of €200 Million through the European Development Fund(EDF) to support:

- Governance
- Sustainable Energy Sector

allocation of €20 Million through the European Union Emergency Trust Fund (EUETF) for material and equipment to rebuild roads to connect Eritrea and Ethiopia.

2019

Why?

The EU and INGOs working
in Eritrea are responding
to:



need to contain or restrain
the exodus of Eritreans

Activities of International NGOs in Eritrea

International NGOs

- Finn Church Aid (FCA)
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
- Vita

Sectors of work

- Education
 - Tertiary (i.e. Colleges, Teachers training)
 - Vocational Training
- Livelihoods
- Capacity Building



The main idea behind the initiatives

FCA, NRC and Vita are working in Education, Livelihoods and Capacity Building, with the assumption that even under the current, ongoing authoritarian circumstances and lack of basic human rights (unfreedoms), if young Eritreans are provided with skills and expertise they will be empowered, they will be able to be masters of their own lives: work, start businesses and stop fleeing the country

**Absolutely forbids forced
labour and Enslavement**

**Absolutely forbids
complicity with Crimes
against Humanity**

The basis of
accountability of EU &
INGO's working

Moral /Ethical - Do No Harm

International Law

Human Right Law

Humanitarian Law

EU Law

IFRCRC Code of Conduct

Humanitarian Charter

Codes of Conduct INGO

IFRCRC CODE OF CONDUCT

The IFRCRC Code of Conduct requires INGO's to be Independent from Government:

“We therefore formulate our own policies and implementation strategies and do not seek to implement the policy of the Government, except in so far as it coincides with our own.....We will never knowingly or through negligence allow ourselves, or our employees, to be used to gather information of political, military or economically sensitive nature for Governments or other bodies “

HUMANITARIAN CHARTER

Humanity - human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found

Neutrality - those who provide aid must not take sides in conflicts or engage in hostilities of political, racial, religious or ideological nature

Impartiality – Aid is to be provided on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases, irrespective of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class and political opinion

Independence – Those who provide aid must be autonomous from political, economic, military or other objectives with regard to areas where assistance is being provided

The context of authoritarian rule

- The *BTI 2018: Country Report Eritrea* describes the situation for NGOs in Eritrea as follows:
- “[Associations] and interest groups acting independently of the PFDJ are prohibited. The party claims that the Eritrean people are a single mass sharing the same interest, and that it is the only organisation representing the interests of all social groups. “The government’s view that civil society has no role to play in the development of the country, except as an extension of the government, was confirmed during a joint evaluation of Swedish, Norwegian and Danish projects:
- “Regarding NGOs (both foreign and local) the GoE [Government of Eritrea] does not see a major role for NGOs in Eritrea’s development efforts in its aid policy. Increasing bilateral donor support through NGOs and their subsequent increase in numbers has played an important role in restricting NGOs activities in 2005 by the Government of Eritrea”
- The presence of the new international NGOs in the country, is in no way an indication of a change in the Eritrean government’s attitude towards the civil society or concerning conditions within the country.

Are the EU and INGOs emboldening authoritarian rule in Eritrea?

- Any development partner working in Eritrea must safeguard against:
 - Operating as an extension of the Government
- A Government accused of crimes against humanity
- No evidence that FCA, NRC and Vita can function independently due to
 - Legal Framework for NGO's
 - Practice of Eritrean Government

Compromising independence and impartiality of NGOs operations

Proclamation No 145 of 2005, requires that INGOs work humanitarian sector . To work in development, INGO's must agree with the relevant government line agency and obtain a waiver from the Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare.

The three INGOs working in Eritrea are working in partnership with and at the direction of the government in the development sector.

It is a parallel arrangement that is not within the framework of the 2005 law and is totally dependent on the whim of the government.

INGO are required to work with government entities

PFDJ directs where they work and who they work with

Administration works under unscrutinised instruction of President's office

The actual reporting lines for the INGO's are to the President's office (top aids)

Complicity with forced labour and enslavement

The nationalisation of human resources through the integration of:

- Education
- National Service
- Warsay Yikaalo National Development Programme

is the main source of human rights violations that resulted in the UN Special Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea finding that crimes against humanity have been, and continue to be, committed in Eritrea

Working in the education sector, FCA and NCA are supporting the governments integrated policy of National Service, with the Warsay Yikaalo National Development Programme and education, which facilitates forced labour.

Students who have laboured under the current integrated system in Eritrea describe their situation in the following terms:

“[the] situation in Eritrea is the same as slavery long time ago ...”

Putting local staff in danger

- Eritrean Citizens , and in particular those working for international organisations, are subject to comprehensive surveillance
- According to the Government :
 - NGO's have hidden agendas
 - Eritreans working for NGO's are spies for foreign entities
- There is no evidence that EU, FCA, NRC, and Vita have considered such issues or that they have conducted any due diligence assessment so as to ensure that there is no harm to their staff or that they are able to protect their local staff from such risks

Legitimising Government political agenda – Enabling fungible financial infrastructure

- PFDJ operates parallel economic systems
- All foreign currency transactions are kept out of the country
- No National Budget published
- INGO with foreign currency accounts represent a fungible financial contribution to PFDJ
- Such contribution is susceptible to being misused for illicit/ illegal activities - strengthening the PFDJ dominance over the country

Legitimising PFDJ's political agenda – providing it with political platform

- The INGOs, and particularly Vita, have lent themselves as a mouthpiece for the Government of Eritrea, legitimising the government and providing it with a political platform in the EU.
- Vita has supported the government in denying the findings of the UN Commission of Inquiry, which found that there was reasonable evidence to conclude that crimes against humanity are ongoing in Eritrea

“It seems that Vita has given Isaias Afewerki the pleasure of acquiring his own diplomatic Trojan horse. Far from its mission of helping poor farmers improve their livelihoods, it is actually endangering their lives. By playing the role of lobby group and enabling one of the top advisers of the criminal regime to appear at a conference at the EU, it is helping the regime gain diplomatic ground that will allow it to continue to commit more crimes against its own people. (Yohannes, 2016)

Price for presence by EU and INGOs

- They must accept that they have no possibility to influence any of the government's policies.
- They must accept the nationalization of the Eritrean labour force through the combined effect of militarized education; national service and the Warasy Yikaalo National Development Programme.
- They have to admit that they are constrained to follow the direct instructions of the senior leadership of the regime which has no accountability and functions mostly through parallel systems and under no democratic institutions.
- They have to accept that their financial resources are entirely fungible in a country that has no national or government budget, that relies on private accounts which belong to the leaders of the dictatorship, and whose treasury is managed by the Head of Finance of the PFDJ.
- They have to accept that, given the context of arbitrary arrest, disappearance and general harassment of nationals working for international organisations, they have not carried out the necessary risk assessment or put in place any safeguards for their staff who are placed in very risky and dangerous situations.
- The international NGOs are not only paying a heavy price but also providing goods and services that strengthen the hands of the PFDJ, which keeps absolute control over both, including any space for private business outside national service.

Eritrea / Ethiopia peace process

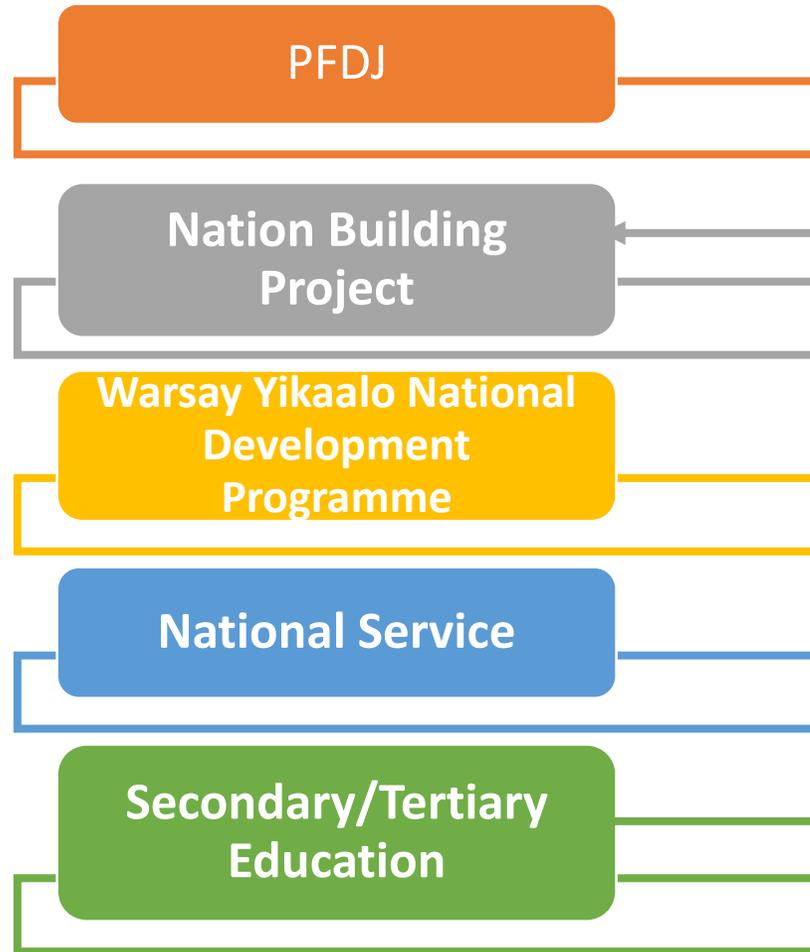
NO CHANGE IN ERITREA

"...[During] the past 17 years, the Government of Eritrea has maintained tight control over the country, stifling any form of public debate and participation. I have received reports that the former Minister of Finance, who recently wrote two books on the current state of affairs in the country, including the rule of law, has been arrested in Asmara during the morning of 17 September 2018. If confirmed, this arrest on the eve of the anniversary of the 2001 clampdown would add to the apprehension that improvements in Eritrea's external relations are not mirrored inside, especially regarding respect for fundamental rights and freedoms..... [Comprehensive] reforms at the domestic level are required on the path towards a free, just and democratic society, with citizens enjoying all their human rights..."(Keetharuth, 2018)

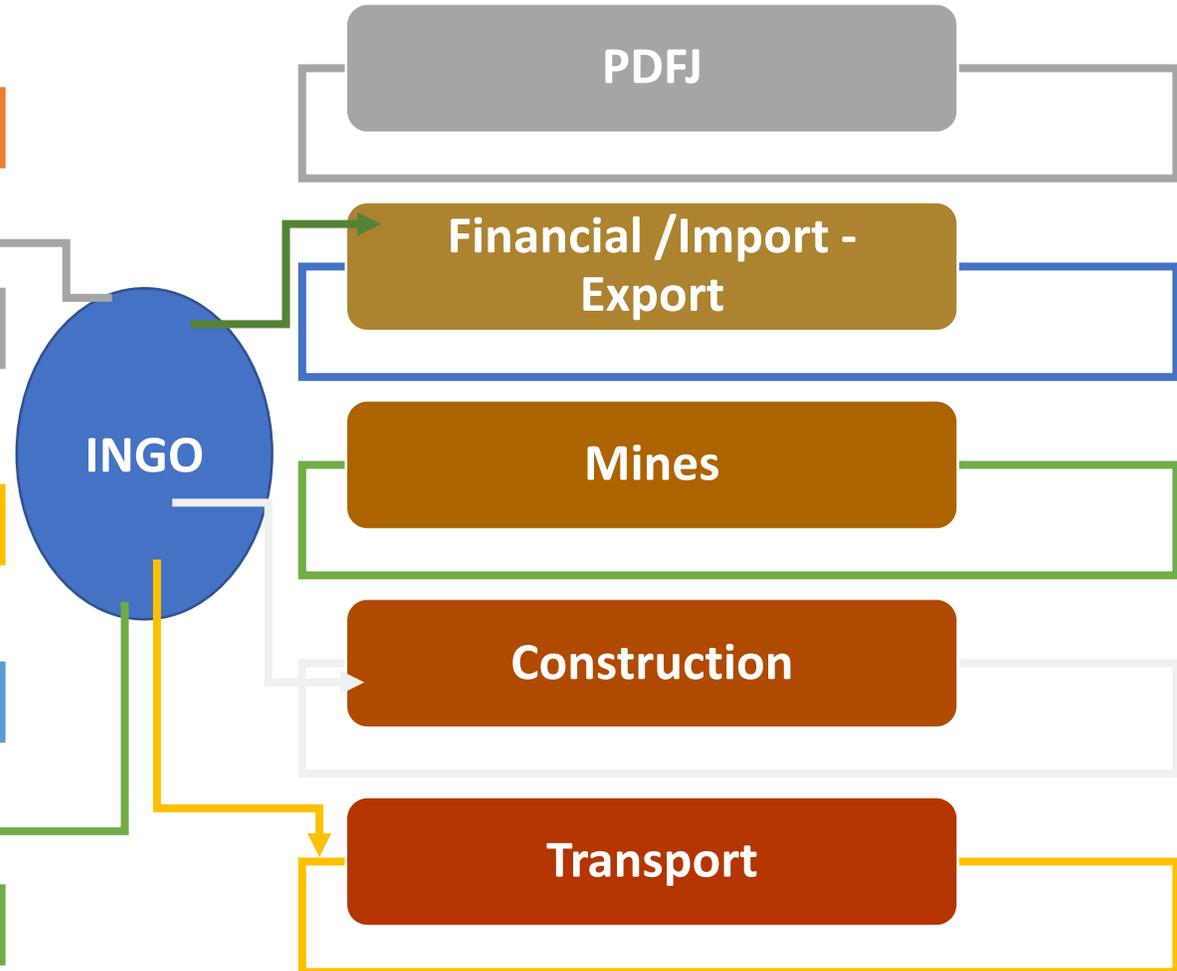
"The Committee is concerned that the length of the national service, which, initially stipulated by the National Service Proclamation No. 82/1995 for the period of 18 months, has been extended by a mandatory national service programme called the "Warsai Yikaalo Development Campaign" for an indefinite period. It is further concerned that indefinite duration of military/civil service reportedly remains one of the main causes for the departure of Eritreans from the State party. It is also concerned about allegations that national service conscripts are deployed for labour in various posts, including mining and construction plants owned by private companies, while receiving no or very little salary. The Committee is further concerned that the State party does not recognize a right to conscientious objection to military service and does not provide for alternative military service (arts. 6, 8 and 18). 38. The State party should limit the length of mandatory military and national service to a maximum period of 18 months, in accordance with international standards. It should ensure the legal recognition of conscientious objection to military service and provide for alternative service of a civilian nature for conscientious objectors. It should also refrain from subjecting persons in military service to activities that may amount to forced labour" (CCPR/C/ERI/CO/1 : 2019)

Contributions of aid to Eritrea's Unscrutinised Control by PFDJ

Human Resources (nationalised)



Economic Sectors



Results

EU and INGO's are operating within the system as extension of the government and are therefore failing in their Moral /Ethical and Human Rights duty to **"Do No Harm"**

The devastating fact is that the EU and international NGOs are normalizing the practices of a regime that has one of the worst human rights records world-wide, which stands accused of committing crimes against humanity, and a country in which no work can be implemented without accepting the reality that work in the country is based on forced labour and enslavement.

Conclusion

These practices constitute a violation of international law, a violation of EU law which absolutely prohibits the use of enslavement, and violate the humanitarian mission of the international NGOs.



The European Union and international NGOs should, therefore, halt all activities in Eritrea – immediately!