

## **The kidnapped foreigners are freed and the Afars continue to struggle to regain their kidnapped rights**

The recent kidnapping in remote Afar region has attracted enormous media attention, and many things have been said about the Afars as result. Some News Agencies like Reuters depicted our people as barbaric and we only deplore this kind of misinformation. The Afars to the contrary are people very known among their neighbours for their hospitability and for even dying to defend their guests.

It is now becoming clear that the kidnapping was not motivated by ransom or robbery as have been speculated by some observers, but a politically motivated act aimed at sending a signal to the Tigrean ruling parties who are in control of state power both in Ethiopian and Eritrea that marginalize the Afar people and use their natural resources for their private gain.

The freeing of the five Europeans kidnapped at the beginning of this month is a relief and good news. The Afar community in Diaspora was suffering with both kidnapped ones and their relatives during their hard times. It's why some Afar organizations in Europe appealed for the immediate release of the hostages.

We are now very concerned about the eight Ethiopians who still remain hostage, and call upon ARDUF to release them without delay.

We would like also to express our appreciation for the Afar elders who successfully negotiated the release of the kidnapped Europeans, and request them to continue their engagement until all remaining hostages are released.

We would also like to use this opportunity to call upon Ethiopian and Eritrean governments to release all prisoners of conscience (hostages) without any preconditions.

### **Root causes of the problems in Afar areas that cause popular wrath**

- The marginalization of the Afar people in terms of basic development and services, while their resources are exploited by Tigrean elites in both Ethiopia and Eritrea
- Repeatedly broken promises by successive Ethiopian rulers, the latest of which is denial of the self-government granted by the constitution of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia
- The forced upon partition of Afars between Ethiopia and Eritrea which also resulted in dismantling of Assab Autonomous Region
- High-handedness and micro management by the ruling party through appointed puppets by conducting fake elections hailed at times as progress of democracy by some Western countries. The current puppet regional government that was hand picked by TPLF officials has been imposed upon the Afars for more than a decade (13 years)
- Confiscation of thousands of hectors of fertile land along the Awash River which have tremendous consequence on their livelihood. The Sugar Plantation and Sugar Factory on 200 000 hectares in the lower Awash Valley, and grabbing of Afar land in Upper Awash Valley for similar purpose are some examples
- Continuous appropriation of fertile Afar land for the benefit of high ranking TPLF officials and merchants of Tigray origin
- Monopolization of the Afar salts concessions in places like As'ale and Afdera mainly by Tigray merchants

- The sustained military campaign by Somali-Issas against the Afars to which the ruling party turns a blind eye or encourage at times
- Confiscations of Afar land along the Red Sea coast by Shabia officials and control of the fishing business by the government officials and their relatives
- Arbitrary detention of hundreds of Afar politicians, intellectuals, and merchants in Eritrea who have now been detained for more than a decade

The Afar Forum which is mad up by Afar Diaspora calls upon all the human right organizations, the international community, all the peace loving people and specially upon the countries of origin of the hostages that were freed by Afar rebel group to put pressure both on Ethiopian and Eritrean governments to respect the basic human rights of the Afar people in both countries and stop immediately atrocities against the Afar people.

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