

# IPPFoRB

International Panel of Parliamentarians  
for Freedom of Religion or Belief

14 September 2016

His Excellency Isaias Afwerki  
President  
Republic of Eritrea  
Asmara, Eritrea

Dear President Afwerki:

We write as a global network of parliamentarians from diverse political, religious, and geographical backgrounds, committed to the promotion and protection of the freedom of religion and belief for all to respectfully express our concern about the status of freedom of religion or belief in Eritrea. We urge your government to initiate reforms to allow Eritreans to freely practice the religion of their choice, and we would welcome an opportunity to speak with you further about these reforms.

We commend the peaceful relations between religious communities in Eritrea, especially given the instability in the region. However, we are gravely troubled by the Eritrean government's detention and reported torture of religious prisoners and the restrictive legal structure that prohibits Eritrean citizens from exercising their full religious freedom rights.

It is unacceptable that hundreds of Eritreans are detained in extremely harsh conditions solely for practicing their religion. We are particularly concerned by the 20-plus year detention of Paulos Eyassu, Issac Mogos, and Negede Teklemariam, the 12 year detention of Dr Kiflu Gebremeskel and Reverend Haile Naizge, and the 10-year house arrest of Patriarch Antonios. We urge your government to immediately and unconditionally release these and all other prisoners of conscience.

We also are troubled by the lack of legal protections for freedom of religion or belief in Eritrea. The government's failure to implement the 1997 constitution, which specifically protects this right, or to register religious communities who have applied under the 2002 registration law denies these populations a legal basis on which to practice their faith, including holding services or other religious ceremonies, and leave them vulnerable to arrest and detention. And the 1994 decree revoking Jehovah's Witnesses' citizenship rights completely denies them their basic human rights. We urge the government of Eritrea to bring national laws and regulations, including registration requirements for religious communities,

into compliance with international human rights standards; end persecution of unregistered communities and register such groups; grant full citizenship rights to Jehovah's Witnesses; and provide for conscientious objection by law. Further, we understand your government is drafting a new constitution: we urge that it include strong protections for freedom of religion or belief in line with international human rights standards.

Thank you for taking into consideration our concerns and recommendations. We look forward to fruitful future discussions on improving freedom of religion or belief in Eritrea.

Sincerely,

CC: Presidential Advisor Yemane Ghebream

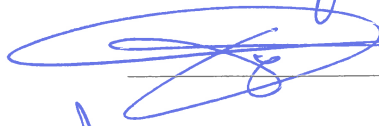
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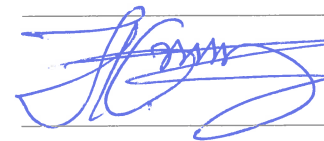


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