

His Excellency
President Issayas Afewerki
Office of the President
PO Box 257
Asmara, ERITREA

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the imprisonment of Petros Solomon, a former Minister in your government.

In May 2001, a group of 15 senior party officials publicized their concerns about the Eritrean government's progress towards democracy in an open letter to PFDJ members. On the night of September 18, 2001, 11 of the 15 signatories were arrested. They have been held incommunicado without charge or trial ever since, despite national and international calls for information on the whereabouts.

Amnesty International considers these 11 detainees to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of the political views. They have not been charged with a recognizable criminal offense, and they are being held incommunicado without access to their families, lawyers or an international humanitarian organization.

In particular, I am concerned about the arrest and detention without trial of Petros Solomon, who is being held in an unknown location and his current health conditions are unknown. He is the former Minister of Maritime Resources, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, former Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) military commander, head of EPLF intelligence and politbureau member since 1977.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Eritrea is a signatory, states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." Article 19 of Eritrea's Constitution guarantees Freedom of Conscience, Religion, Expression of Opinion, Movement, Assembly and Organization. In particular, it states that "Every person shall have the freedom of speech and expression, which include freedom of the press and other media." Furthermore, Article 28 states that "Executive and the agencies of government shall not take any action which abolishes or abridges the fundamental rights and freedoms conferred by this Constitution." Thus, the detention of Petros Solomon and the other G-15 signatories violates not only internationally recognized standard but also Eritrea's own Constitution.

I request that the government of Eritrea release immediately Petros Solomon and others who are under similar illegal detention.

I look forward to hearing from you regarding this important matter.

Yours respectfully,

cc: Ambassador Ghirmai Ghebremariam
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