

## **OPEN LETTER TO:**

**Mrs. Simonetta Sommaruga Head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police**  
**Mr. Mario Gattiker Secretary of the State Secretariat for Migration**

### **A CALL FOR IMMEDIATE REVERSAL OF THE JUNE 2016 SWISS ASYLUM POLICY PERTAINING TO ERITREAN ASYLUM SEEKERS**

We, the undersigned, are concerned individuals, who have congregated in Zurich for a two-day event known as “Blackbox Eritrea.” Our main objective is generating renewed attention on the sad situation of human rights violations in Eritrea and the latest drastic policy of the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), with regard to newly arriving Eritrean asylum seekers in Switzerland. On the latter account, we would like to make the following call on SEM and on other relevant Swiss government authorities, with a view to requesting immediate reversal of the new asylum policy of June 2016 pertaining to Eritrean asylum seekers.

We believe that the fundamental factors that compel Eritreans to flee their home country in droves have never changed in any substantive way. This has been confirmed as recently as in October 2016 by a landmark judgement of the Upper Tribunal at the UK Administrative Appeals Chamber (Immigration and Asylum Tribunal). The most important factors for the mass exodus of Eritreans can be summed up as: 1) an on-going situation of gross human rights violations, including a pervasive culture of impunity characterised by crimes against humanity; 2) the continued practice of compulsory and indefinite national-military service program without formal pay.

In spite of the empty rhetoric and hallow promises the Eritrean government makes from time to time, we are of the view that there has been no meaningful change in the political reality of Eritrea, to an extent which justifies the sort of change of policy SEM has adopted in June 2016. In our view, the change of policy, which is exceedingly detrimental to the plight of Eritrean asylum seekers in Switzerland, is based on erroneous assumptions and incorrect conclusions about the objective political situation in Eritrea. This needs to be rectified immediately.

Information collected from reliable alternative sources, including key and knowledgeable Eritreans who have fled the country over the fast few months, depicts a very sad state of the political reality in Eritrea. Furthermore, it needs to be noted that Eritrea is now the only African country, experiencing an on-going situation of crimes against humanity, officially confirmed to be so by a UN fact-finding mission. The catalogue of crimes documented by the UN commission of inquiry on Eritrea include a persistent, widespread and systematic perpetration of abhorrent crimes, such as *enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, other inhumane acts, persecution, rape and murder*, which are being committed against a large number of victims.

Seen against this background, the latest policy of SEM comes as very problematic not only in terms of its far-fetching consequences on the plight of Eritrean asylum seekers but also in terms of the damage it entails to Switzerland’s international reputation as a refugee-friendly country with a well-known historical record of humanitarianism. In light of this, we call on SEM and other relevant Swiss government authorities to reverse the latest asylum policy in question and adopt a more favourable solution (as has been the case in the past), by reinstating the previous legal protection accorded to Eritrean asylum seekers in this country. Morality and international refugee law require this.

