



May 18, 2013

The Honorable UN Secretary-General Banki Moon

United Nations Headquarters
405 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

"Remember those who are in prison, as if you were their fellow prisoner. Remember those who are suffering as if you were suffering with them..." (Heb. 13:3).

The Honorable Secretary -General

We, the undersigned clergy of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, are writing this letter to ask your kind help on behalf of our church leader, His Holiness Patriarch Antonios, those who are suffering religious persecution in Eritrea and the thousands of Eritrean young people who have become victims of human trafficking.

His Holiness Patriarch Antonios is a man of God who had dedicated his life to comforting the poor and feed the hungry for over 35 years. It was as a testimony of such a dedicated life that he was chosen to become a bishop, and was eventually elected Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church in 2004.

The significant portion of Eritrea's population now lives in Diaspora. Most left the country in the 1980s and 1990s seeking refuge from tyranny and persecution. In most recent years, hundreds of thousands of Eritreans, mostly the young, continue to flee the country to avoid religious persecution and the denial of basic human rights. Hundreds of thousands are also currently in refugee camps in northern Ethiopia, Sudan and Djibouti. Thousands of these refugees who are fleeing the scourge in their homeland are falling prey to the worst form of human trafficking, degradation and modern day slavery. A significant number of the clergy of the Eritrean Orthodox Church have also left the country. They currently live as refugees in Ethiopia, Sudan and Israel.

The persecution of people of faith in Eritrea began as early as 1993, soon after Eritrea attained its independence. The current system of persecution is designed to prevent people of faith from freely exercising their faith as they have faithfully done for centuries. The extreme escalation of religious persecution in Eritrea reached its crescendo with the illegal dethronement and imprisonment of His Holiness Patriarch Antonios.

Our Holy Father has been in incarceration since August 2005. He has neither been seen nor heard from. The uncanonical removal of His Holiness has been publicly denounced by the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Churches that are in full communion with the Eritrean Orthodox Church worldwide. The only "crimes" for which His Holiness has suffered so much are (1) His open criticism of the Eritrean regime for its interference in the affairs of the Church (2) His dare to question the imprisonment of numerous priests and church scholars without being charged, and (3) His opposition to the government's policy of conscripting the clergy into military service.

Government authorities have imposed restrictions on church services, catechisms and Sunday schools, resulting again in the arrest of a large number of priests and church elders. Currently, the eighty-six year old pontiff is suffering from the debilitating effects of diabetes, hypertension and related ailments for which he has been denied medical care.

We, the undersigned clergy of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, are writing this letter requesting the kind help of your good office to bring the case of His Holiness Patriarch Antonios before your esteemed office.

We call:

- (1) For the immediate release of His Holiness Patriarch Antonios from prison and provide him with the necessary medical care.
- (2) For the release of all those who are in prison because of their religious faith.

- (3) Furthermore, we call for an immediate intervention to put a stop to the unprecedented level of human trafficking in the Sinai desert, perpetrated against thousands of Eritrean young people who are fleeing the suffering in Eritrea.

Respectfully Yours,

The Archdiocese of the Eritrean Orthodox Church in North America
 The Archdiocese of the Eritrean Orthodox Church in Europe
 The Archdiocese of the Eritrean Orthodox Church in Middle East

Clergy of the Archdiocese of the Eritrean Orthodox Church

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		<p>Fathers of the St Mary Eritrean Orthodox Church, Tel Aviv, Israel</p>

This letter has been sent to the following officials and agencies as well:

**The Honorable Secretary of
State John Kerry**

U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
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**The Honorable Sheila B.
Keetharuth,
Special Rapporteur on the
situation of human rights in
Eritrea**

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