

TAKE ACTION: Please cut and paste this letter onto your personal or Institutional letterhead calling for the immediate and unconditional release of nine Eritrean journalists detained since 2001.

September 15, 2006

His Excellency Isaias Aferwerki
President
State of Eritrea
Asmara, Eritrea

Excellency,

I wish to add my name to this appeal from PEN Canada, the Canadian centre of the international writers' organization, International PEN. PEN Canada is writing to call for information on the whereabouts of nine Eritrean Journalists.

Five years ago this month, the journalists were arrested as part of a widespread crackdown by your government on political opposition and independent voices in the media. At the time, politicians and editorial writers had been calling for democratic reform and respect for fundamental human rights.

The journalists, who collectively are Honorary Members of PEN Canada, are: **Yusuf Mohamed Ali, Mattewos Habteab, Dawit Habtemichael, Medhanie Haile, Emanuel Asrat, Temesken Ghebreyesus, Dawit Isaac, Fesshaye Yohannes and Said Abdelkader.**

After they were detained and placed in state custody, their fate is still not known. None of the journalists was formally charged with any crime, despite the fact that Eritrean law forbids holding prisoners for more than 30 days without charge. Your administration has also refused to release information about their health or legal status.

Comments by authorities have often been contradictory. They have at different times denied that a clampdown took place, claiming instead that the journalists have merely been sent to carry out their national service, or explained that the closures and mass arrests were necessary for the sake of national unity; or were effected because of the failure of the newspapers to comply with laws covering media licences. On another occasion, your government accused them of being foreign spies and mercenaries

PEN Canada is greatly discouraged that your government has refused to provide the international community with a proper and full explanation for the action taken against these nine journalists. We believe that these men were simply doing their job, yet were punished in clear violation of their right to freedom of expression, as guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We demand that you disclose information about the writers and release them from custody as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

[Your name and address]

Copies to:

Consulate of the State of Eritrea
75 Albert Street, Suite 610
Ottawa ON K1P 5E7
Fax: +1 613 234 6213

Embassy of the State of Eritrea
1708 New Hampshire Ave, NW
Washington DC 20009
Fax: +1 202 319 1304

Permanent Mission of Eritrea to the United Nations
800 Second Avenue, 18th Floor
New York NY 10017
Fax: +1 212 687 3138
E-mail: eritrea@un.int

Please send copies of your appeal to the following Canadian authorities:

The Hon. Peter MacKay
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Lester B. Pearson Building, Room A-10
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa ON K1A 0G2
Fax: (613) 996 3443
E-mail: peter.mackay@international.gc.ca

The Canadian Embassy to Eritrea
c/o The Canadian High Commission
P.O. Box 1013, 00621
Nairobi, Kenya
Jim Wall, Ambassador
Fax: +011 254 20 366 3900
E-mail: nrobi@international.gc.ca

Consulate of Canada in Asmara
P.O. Box 3962
Asmara, Eritrea
Fax: +011 291 1 18 64 88 / 18 42 41
E-mail: mkcca@cts-com.er, mkcca1@yahoo.com

Peter Harder
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
Foreign Affairs Canada
E-mail: peter.harder@international.gc.ca

Ulla Kourany
Deputy Director and Senior Policy Advisor
East and South Africa Division
Foreign Affairs Canada
E-mail: ulla.kourany@international.gc.ca

George Jacoby
Desk Officer, Eritrea
Foreign Affairs Canada
E-mail: george.jacoby@international.gc.ca

Gwyn Kutz
Director, Human Rights Division
Foreign Affairs Canada
E-mail: gwyn.kutz@international.gc.ca