

Eritreans Ask Italian PM to Cancel Visit to Asmara, Or Take Bodies of 360 Lampedusa Victims with Him

(EPDP-ENS-UEJ memo)

At this occasion of the 5th anniversary of the Lampedusa Tragedy of 3 October, 2013, and in connection with the planned visit to Asmara by the Italian Prime Minister, three Eritreans organizations addressed a strong memorandum to the Italian Government expressing “deep regret and disappointment” at Italy’s “repeated failures to help Eritreans” at their hours of difficulty and great need.



Addressed to Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and his Foreign Minister, Enzo M. Milanese, the message wished to remind the Italian Government that the highly repressive regime in Eritrea “does not deserve to be dignified” by a high-level delegation from Italy before that regime starts to implement at least some of the recommendations of UN Human Rights Council.

The Italian Prime Minister, Mr. Giuseppe Conte, was asked to kindly canceling the visit, or at least consider taking with him to Asmara the 360 bodies of Lampedusa victims for proper burial in Eritrea.

The Eritrean organizations also referred to instances of Italy’s past failures to help its ex-colony Eritrea. It mentions Italy’s apology to Libya for “past wounds” and a compensation package of US\$5 billion it gave to Libya in 2009 as “material and emotional recognition” of Italy’s past mistakes during the colonial period.

Below is the full text of the memorandum addressed to the Italian Government by the three Eritrean organizations, namely, the Eritrean People’s Democratic Party (EPDP); the Eritrean National Salvation (ENS-Hidri), and Unity of Eritreans for Justice (UEJ).



UEJ



EPDP



ENS-Hidri

Eritrean Justice Seekers' Message to Italian Government and Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte

*To: H.E. Mr. Giuseppe Conte,
Prime Minister of Italy*

*CC: H.E. Mr. Enzo Moavero Milanesi,
Italian Foreign Minister,
Palazzo della Farnesina, Roma*

3 October, 2018

Dear Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte,

At this Commemoration Day of the Lampedusa Tragedy and in relation to the planned visit to Eritrea this month by Italian delegation led by Your Excellency, we, the undersigned members of Eritrean pro-democracy organizations in exile, are addressing this message to you and through you to the Italian Government to express our deep regret and disappointment at Italy's repeated failures to help Eritreans whom it literally abandoned soon after the end of its colonial rule in 1941.

It is five years today since the occurrence of the Lampedusa Tragedy of 3 October 2013 in which over 360 young Eritreans perished only a few meters from the Italian island of that name. They died because their desperate calls for help were not responded humanely by concerned Italian authorities. And to this day, their bodies remain in underground vaults in southern Italy waiting for proper burial one day back at home in Eritrea.

We are saying, Sir, that the repressive regime in Eritrea does not deserve to be dignified by a visit of a Prime Minister of Italy. The Italian people know very well the sad political and human rights situation in Eritrea and it is distressing to learn that the current Italian Government and Prime Minister Conte are decided to ignore the prolonged suffering of the Eritrean people and make an appeasement with the regime in

Asmara by a visit whose simplistic aim may be curbing the flow of refugees from Eritrea before addressing the root causes of the problem itself.

The Italian State was among the supporters of UN decisions on Eritrea, including the resolutions and recommendations of the UN Human Rights Council and the 2016 conclusions of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea. Normally, we would expect Italy to first pressurize the Eritrean regime to address those concerns of the international community before deciding for such an undeserved visit at the level of Italy's Prime Minister. Presumably, the visit is intended to negotiate points of agreement that would further worsen the plight Eritrean refugees already in Italy.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte,

We wish to re-state here that the majority of Eritreans are of the belief that Italy has not done enough to help Eritreans at their hours of need during the past 77 years. It is a general perception that the sufferings of our people could have been avoided if Italy were to care a little more than it did to its former colony of Eritrea, not to mention Somalia and Libya which are not also in good shape.

It is a common understanding that the Italian State did not even try help Eritreans in the form of compensations, as it did for others. It is to be recalled that on 30 August 2009, the Government of Italy apologized for "past wounds" to Libya and agreed to pay a compensation package of US \$5 billion "as a material and emotional recognition of the mistakes that [Italy] has done to [Libya] during the colonial era". The worst part of it was that the agreement with Libya was made at the cost of many Eritrean refugees condemned to be sent from Italy to Libya's Moammar Qadhafi who was in turn willing, as he did before that, to forcibly repatriate those helpless refugees back to the repressive regime in Asmara. We are afraid that this bad scenario of forcible return of refugees to Eritrea could be repeated now in 2018.

We, therefore, appeal to Your Excellency and the Italian Government to kindly cancel the planned official visit to Asmara. But if the visit is not to be avoided, then we at least ask you to kindly consider shipping back to Eritrea for proper burial of the bodies Lampedusa victims that are kept in temporary underground graves in Sicily.

Sincerely Yours,

For: -

The Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP)

The Eritrean National Salvation (ENS-Hidri)

United Eritreans for Justice (UEJ)