

## Press release

Ethiopian refugees protesting at the UNHCR main gate  
Khartoum, Sudan (December 2, 2006)



We are Ethiopian refugees who fled our country recently at different times. We have staged a peaceful protest at the UNHCR gate in Khartoum since November 20, 2006. We are more than 200. More than 60 of us are women some of us with our kids and some pregnant. Our demands are simple and straight forward - to be recognized as legal refugees and get protected by the international law as stipulated by the Geneva Convention of 1951.

At present, our health is deteriorating due to the hunger strike we carried and lack of food and our exposure to two extreme weather conditions. We are passing the days and the nights in an open space just on the tarmac. Our mattresses are tattered cartoons. The cold season has just entered. The nights are freezing cold. We are sharing one blanket for three or for four. Many of us are exposed to pneumonia and common cold. The area is infested with mosquitoes. Again many of us fall sick of malaria frequently due to lack of resistant. Most of Those who suffer from malaria and the freezing cold are children, pregnant women and elderly people. We are prevented to use the water and toilet facilities at other side of the gate. So far only a Sudanese Humanitarian organization is helping us in medical treatments.

Before we started the protest we had pleaded the UNHCR and COR since we set our feet in Khartoum to register and our cases assessed and determined. We started our protest twelve days ago at the peak of the aliens control campaign which started on November 15, 2006. The campaign declares all foreigners with no valid IDs as illegal that would be subject to arrest, taken to court and subsequently deported if failed to produce a document that warrants living in the Sudan. The Sudan government has been generous enough to forewarn its campaign at least ahead a month. The UNHCR and COR could have used this time to protect us and other genuine refugees from failing victims. They didn't. We had no choice except taking a refuge at the UNHCR gate to avoid possible arrest, imprisonment and deportation.

The aliens crack down once more high lights UNHCR's bias towards Ethiopian refugees ever since the current Ethiopian regime took power in 1991. The fact that there are thousands Ethiopian economic refugees can not preclude the presence of genuine refugees. The June and November 2005 massacres of peaceful protesters and the incarnation of opposition parties' leaders, members of the free press and civic organization following the May 15, 2005 election should have been an eye opener for the UNHCR to revise its wrong policy towards Ethiopian refugees and asylum seekers.

Now, the UNHCR officials at Khartoum, rather than addressing our simple demands they are threatening to use force to evict us from its gate. Also a person who declared himself as a Sudanese parliamentarian who avoided the media and declined to give his name has also threatened us unless we leave the gate. He even tried to horrify us by reminding the Massacre of 265 Sudanese refugees who were protesting outside the UNHCR gate by the Egyptian police on December 30, 2005 in Cairo. That massacre of unarmed refugees is a shame both for the regime of Egypt and UNHCR not to be proud of. We believe law makers (parliamentarians) should pursue the UNHCR and COR to honor international laws not harass helpless peacefully protesting refugees.

Once more, we implore the UNHCR to heed our demands. We are peaceful and will remain so. We want to negotiate and to conclude it peacefully without dragging it further. We have been in the freezing cold weather in a dehumanized condition because of local UNHCR official's adamant position not to give a definite response to our demands. We would like to remind the UNHCR any harm, no matter its guise may be, befall up on us is its sole responsibility..

There fore we demand:

- UNHCR and COR to respect our right to seek asylum,
- UNHCR to stop its bias to wards Ethiopian refugees,
- UNHCR to stop its pretext that Ethiopians have no reason to be refugees which is tantamount supporting the fascist regime which massacred many hundreds of innocent civilians.

Finally we appeal to all humanitarian organizations, and peace loving individuals to pressure UNHCR and the Sudanese government to heed our simple and straight forward demands.

We also appeal to the media, particularly; the electronic Medias to high light our situation and our cause.