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RWCHR Files Complaint to UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on Behalf of Dawit Isaak and his Colleagues, the Longest Detained Journalists in the World

International Coalition Calls for Accountability for Eritrean Government's Gross Human Rights Violations

Montreal - July 21, 2022 - The Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights (RWCHR), in partnership with an international coalition of leading NGOs, including Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA), PEN International, DefendDefenders, and Mr. Isaak's Swedish legal counsel, filed a complaint to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention calling for accountability for the Eritrean government's gross human rights violations against Dawit Isaak and his colleagues, the longest detained journalists in the world today, and their immediate and unconditional release.

"This is an emblematic case, reflecting not only the situation of Dawit Isaak and his 15 journalist colleagues, who have been subjected to arbitrary detention since 2001, but also that of hundreds of prisoners in Eritrea languishing in jails without due process of law for their real or perceived criticism of the government." – Dr. Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea

"Dawit Isaak has not only been held incommunicado for more than 20 years – deprived of any visits from his family, any consular visits, any right to a lawyer, let alone the right to appear before an independent tribunal – deprived of any human contact – but he has, in effect, been a forcibly disappeared person. Dawit is the case study of the global assault on media freedom. Indeed, his pain and plight are a standing reminder of injustice and a compelling call to action." – Professor Irwin Cotler, RWCHR Founder and International Chair

"It is a disgrace that we are still required to draw attention to the plight of Dawit Isaak and his colleagues. They have never been charged. They have not been granted their right to stand trial. And they have never been sentenced. Their continued incarceration is an appalling indictment of Eritrea's dismal human rights record, and of the international community's human rights commitments." – Jesús Alcalá, Dawit Isaak's Swedish Legal Counsel

More than 20 years ago, Eritrean authorities arbitrarily detained Mr. Isaak – then reporting for Eritrea's first independent newspaper, *Setit* – without charge or trial. He has been held incommunicado without access to family, consular assistance, and the right to counsel. The deprivation of liberty of Mr. Dawit Isaak is unequivocally arbitrary under four separate categories as defined by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Mr. Isaak was arrested along with at least ten other independent journalists, some of whom have since died in detention.

"Eritrea should be ashamed to hold the record for the longest detained journalists in the world. CPJ will continue to pursue every path to justice for Dawit Isaak and his colleagues to



ensure these wrongfully imprisoned journalists are released as soon as possible, and that those responsible for this egregious violation are held to account.” – Angela Quintal, CPJ Africa Program Coordinator

“The arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention of Dawit Isaak and at least 10 other journalists since 2001 not only entrenches impunity but also has a chilling effect on efforts to redress human rights violations. Disregard for the rule of law should neither be condoned nor accepted. Dawit Isaak’s whereabouts must be made public!” – Hassan Shire, DefendDefenders Executive Director

“Dawit Isaak and his colleagues arrested in 2001 are today the longest detained journalists in the world and Eritrea has been at the bottom of our World Press Freedom Index for 20 years. Through this complaint, we are counting on the UN to put pressure on the Asmara regime so that it discloses the state of health of the journalist, his place of detention and that it consents to release him” – Antoine Bernard, RSF Director of Advocacy and Assistance

In light of the Eritrean government’s ongoing assault on, and suppression of, fundamental rights and freedoms, including media freedom and the persecution of journalists in relation to the case and cause of Mr. Isaak and his colleagues, we call on the Eritrean authorities to reveal the whereabouts and physical condition of Mr. Isaak and to immediately and unconditionally release him.

Co-Signed by:

Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights (RWCHR)
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)
PEN International
DefendDefenders
Mr. Jesús Alcalá (Swedish Legal Counsel)
Mr. Percy Bratt (Swedish Legal Counsel)