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**HRW’s Ill-Intentioned Agenda: Targeting Eritrea’s Economy**

In an effort to undermine Eritrea's sustainable development in general, and its promising mining industry in particular, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has issued yet another report based on the usual fabrications and deliberate distortions of Eritrea’s cultural norms and national realities.

Though HRW has admitted that it has no presence in, and had never visited Eritrea, nonetheless, it has boldly chosen to indict Eritrea on “human rights abuses” based on dubious testimonies of only four people. By HRW’s own admission, there were well over 440 Eritrean workers working for Segen at the Bisha mining site, and yet based on an interview of four people HRW is telling us it was able to reach a conclusion on the working conditions in Eritrea’s mining industry. Its methodology is neither scientific nor based on a randomly-selected representative sample. HRW didn’t reach its conclusions based on research or facts, but based on its premeditated agenda of targeting Eritrea’s growing economy.

The intentions of the sponsors of HRW report is clear: failing to cripple the Eritrean economy using sanctions through the UN Security Council as it was attempted in 2011, they are now hoping to use a fake allegation of human rights abuse of workers to advance their ill-intentioned agenda. Their target is Eritrea's economy, particularly the up-and-coming construction industry which is undertaking the commendable task of rebuilding the country with indigenous skill and know-how. By targeting the construction companies, the hope is to force a culture of dependence and systematic exploitation on an African nation. We can only say this is the result of an all too familiar racist mentality that is based on the notion that says: “Africans can do nothing good.”

One thing consistent in the reports by HRW and similar other self-appointed human rights advocates, including Amnesty International, and Christian Solidarity Worldwide, is their ability to exploit their Western audience's ignorance of the cultural underpinnings of the societies they write about, especially those in Africa. They purposely twist and sensationalize the normal way of life in these societies to appeal to Western audiences and market their reports to get some press attention in the West.

For example, here is how a Norwegian Human Rights Center, quoting Amnesty International, attempted to document human rights abuse with a straight face: “*The food was very poor … half-cooked bread, lentils, and half-cooked unsalted cabbage, … placed in a communal bowl … [and] we had to eat by hand … We were given half a cup of tea in the morning, and two meals a day at noon and 4pm. We had tap water to drink*….” How eating by hand lentil and unsalted half-cooked cabbage, from a common bowl, and drinking tap water is considered an abuse is mind boggling. As anyone who visited Eritrean restaurants around the world will attest, Eritreans do not use spoon and fork to eat their food. As the fork is to the Europeans, chopstick to the Chinese, Eritreans have developed an art of eating using their God-given fingers; yes an art that one has to learn using the hands properly.

In a similar vein, the latest HRW report talks of human rights abuses of workers at the Bisha mining site because the workers look “*poorly fed and housed; … that food was consistently inadequate and that meat was ‘out of the question.’ … [workers] had no access to latrines of any kind. Overall, … laborers ‘live[d] a dehumanized, neglected and diminished way of life*.” We are being told absence of meat and modern latrines is a “dehumanizing and neglected way of life.” However, HRW doesn’t care to explain that, for the most part, meat is not part of the daily diet of an overwhelming majority of Eritreans, rich or poor, Christian or Muslim. Most likely the Bisha diet consisted of lentil and other protein-rich legumes and whole wheat or barley based bread, yet because it is not western-style diet full of fat, salt or sugar we are being told it is an exhibit of human rights abuse. For those who care to know, for most Eritreans meat is for special holidays. As for the use of modern latrines, as sad as it sounds, this is the reality of every household in Africa outside of the main cities. Eritrean construction companies such as Segen are getting a flack by people that are totally ignorant of current realities, for the simple fact of working hard to change this reality. In short, the HRW report has neither evidence nor knowledge of human rights abuses. That is why its recommendations are all superfluous.

Another sensational report is one where a Christian Solidarity Worldwide video narrator levels a similar charge based on a complaint by an individual. The narrator says: “*We used to eat [sic] black tea and bread for breakfast, spoonful of lentil in water shared between eight prisoners. Saturdays were really special because spinach was blended with the usual lentil mix. On Sundays we were given the hard inedible meat from animal intestines, as disgusting as that sounds, we chose to eat it simply for the protein*.” Here again, eating in groups of eight, a cherished Eritrean dining culture is being presented an exhibit of abuse. It is the most common way of feasting during weddings or big parties. The size of the group has to be eight, no more no less. In fact, in rural Eritrea eating from your own plate instead of with a group from a big bowl or tray is considered a sign of selfishness. As for the “disgusting” inedible animal intestine, it is a delicacy meal. It is a specialty food that is only prepared for special feasts, it is highly doubtful that it was served to anyone on regular basis. Here it is deliberately being presented to bring outrage among western audiences. To an Eritrean it is not the well cleaned, seasoned and cooked animal intestine that is disgusting, but the meal the West salivates for: food like caviar, lobster, crab or pork. Plain and simple these foods are considered unclean and no one will touch them.

In a nutshell, this particular HRW report should be seen for what it truly is: a malicious distortion of an African reality towards a political end. We hope all those who take time to read the report see through the despicable misrepresentations that are being paraded as concerns for labor and human rights.

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