

## **Statement from Afar Forum**

### **The remaining Hostages are free, but the Afar plight goes on and on**

The kidnapping of eight Ethiopians and five Europeans at the beginning of March has put spotlight on Afar region and the people who inhabit this remote area. The five Europeans were released after about two weeks when Afar elders successfully negotiated with the rebel group that abducted them. The release of the eight remaining Ethiopians recently has been once again secured as the result of crucial role played by the Afar elders, and their successful effort has been recognized by the Ethiopian authorities.

The Afar diaspora right from the beginning has been working unyieldingly to secure freedom of all hostages. We are very delighted that it is all over and all hostages are back to their homes and loved ones safe and sound. We would also like to extend our thanks and express our appreciation for all who contributed to their release and particularly the Afar elders who successfully negotiated the peaceful end of the hostage drama.

Meanwhile, both Ethiopian and Eritrean governments continue to keep the Afar society as hostage in their ancestral homeland and abuse their fundamental human rights. As have been highlighted in our previous Press Releases of 25 March 2007, the root causes of the Afar dissatisfaction and resentment include:

- Repeatedly broken promises by successive Ethiopian rulers in the center that resulted in ever increasing marginalization of the Afars
- High-handedness and micro management by the ruling party through appointed puppets
- monopolization of the Afar salts concessions by Tigray merchants and officials
- the sustained military campaign by Somali-Issas against the Afar nomads in the west
- Confiscation of fertile land around Awash River ( for expansion of Tandaho and Saburre sugar industries) resulting in forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of families

The Afar Forum reiterates its call

- Upon all human right organizations, the international community, all the peace loving people to put pressure both on Ethiopian and Eritrean governments to respect the basic human rights of the Afar people and stop immediately atrocities being committed against them
- Upon Ethiopian and Eritrean governments to release all prisoners of conscience (hostages) without any preconditions

Afar Forum  
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