

Written by
Wednesday, 31 December 2014 13:01 -

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Dear Eritrean Community:

Please follow to this part one of the interview conducted by 3cr radio Eritrean Program on Monday 22ndOf December 2014 at 8.00pm Local time with Professor Mike Smith from Macquarie University's department of policing, intelligence and counter terrorism. Professor Smith has been appointed as a chairperson of a new commission to investigate alleged human rights violations in Eritrea

Q1: Since a commission of inquiry has been set up, it means there are possible crimes of against humanity committed in Eritrea, if so what is the time frame the commission will investigate in?

A: the commission of enquiry has been mandated to investigate alleged human rights violations in Eritrea. We are required; the commission has been established to report back with written report by June 2015 which is only about six months away from here. Now, there is no mentioned in the resolution of crime against humanity so the way which we'll be doing our investigation, will be to try to document what violations of human rights have occurred and if quite possible, I am only say possible and there has been a similar baton in other commission of

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violation of such and had been established that might suggest violation against humanity, but this is not something that this commission is asked to look to. But some other commission will be looking into.

Q2: You launched your inquiry task on the 20th of November 2014 and have already met with Eritreans in Switzerland and Italy. Do you plan to meet Eritreans residing in other countries, in particular the Sudan and Ethiopia where there are a large number of Eritrean refugees?

A: Yes and very definitely and we would like to meet Eritreans who are living in a number of different countries.

We have in fact sent letters to a number of the neighboring countries to Eritrea and asked if we could visit and meet Eritrean people for an interview there, but till now we will not know which countries will be happy to do so and which will not, we do not know which country we will be visiting.

But certainly we will be visiting a number of countries. We would like to visit all countries where Eritreans are living including Australia, but the practical fact is that we have been given a short period of time and we are part time commission and we will not be able to visit all countries, but we will do what we can.

Q3: Are you optimistic that the Eritrean government will allow you to visit Eritrea? If not, how will this affect your work?

A: We have written to the Eritrean government and also spoken to the diplomatic representative in Geneva and have asked for their agreement to our visiting and meeting people, and visiting

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various sites and so on in Eritrea. They have not replied yet and I do not want to pre judge what might a positive respond on that. We are still waiting what might happen. And I think that is a very good way to conduct business.

At the same time the Officer of High Commission of human rights has had a lot of experience in this area. There is been a lot of sort of commission where the commission were not allowed to visit certain countries and collected information from outside the countries from people who have first-hand experience, experts and so on and they were able to provide very credible and compelling reports. So the reality is we will do our report whether we visit Eritrea or not.

Q4: How do you verify the creditability of information you receive?

A: The Commission of enquiry follows usual standard procedure that has established in these sorts of commissions. So only information that reaches the approval standard, which is the reasonable ground to believe will be used to document these human rights violations have occurred. We check the credibility of the information and the reliability of the source of the information and we do that very often by comparing the stories of what a lot of people have said and see there is similar, see where there is different, and see where the common element, we look the details of the information that has been given, and we look for collaboration, in other words, we find one person was at the same place with another person, explains the same sort of things happened, so that is an indication that it happened to some to, so some sort of collaboration. So

Q5: How will you protect the identity of those who provide you with information? As many need assurances that their information and identity will not be leaked to the Eritrean regime.

A: Well this commission in this area and we have really adopted measure of work to ensure the full confidentiality of all information's that is provided as well as the identity of the people who

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have had contact with us. And this is very much in line with the standard that has been established for the previous commission. The information we get from people where we interview the individual, we always ask them would you mind if we share this information with other parts of the United Nations, we say would you mind if your name gets used, and very often they say no, and in such cases we totally respect and we would not put their relatives at risk particularly people who still have relatives at home, and they don't want them to be affected. But we came across some people saying, I am well known or speaking out, I am in the civil society, everyone knows, I say, I speak very openly if my name is used. So with such person it makes it a bit easier.

Q6: You will report to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in June 2015, what will be your next steps?

A: First of all we are actually reporting orally to the human rights council in March 2015, so they asked for a progress report, so we will appear before the human rights council, and we will tell them what we were doing and what we produced so far and we will answer questions from them.

Then in June 2015 as you mentioned middle of June or late June, we have been asked to do an oral presentation and also to the General assembly in its next session and that'll probably be next October 2015. That is what we have been doing. Now in terms of what the recommendations of the commission of enquiry will be, we cannot say, simply because we have not worked them out. But I would expect that they will include recommendations for follow up for different people and it is likely to some recommendations directed to the U.N and quite possible recommendations for other countries. In other words there will be scope for other countries to follow what we have done. Our mandate finishes once we have done that report.

Q7: How can people with information contact you? Would you be prepared to reach to such persons wherever they may be?

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A: Absolutely, now what we have done is we lodged a call for submission when we had our first meeting a few weeks ago in Geneva. And you can find that on the website. You can also ask anyone who has got information relevant to this topic to send us a email before the closing date of 31st of January 2015.

We simply have to out a closing date because we cannot continue to receive information and follow it up any later then that, simply we don't have time to include it in our report, but anyone can send information to us, they can contact us on our website so if you want your listeners can visit the commission enquiry to Eritrea website which is or send us a email at coieritrea@ohcr.org If anyone does send us information, we will follow some of it for further questions and we will use it to contact them and ask them for more information.

Q8:There are many opposition organizations and political parties with up to date information on the human rights situation in Eritrea, will you accept that evidence

A: The answer to this question is a summary to all the answers he's given

Q9:Are you willing to accept cooperation with civil society groups and activists? If so, how do you foresee such cooperation to be?

A: Well any information provided, we will accept any information from any source, but of course we will check with the accordance with the standard proof adopted by, the commission and of course we'll look at the reliability of the source and credibility of the information and of course look for external cooperation, but in principle anyone can contact us and give us information.

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Q10: Finally, are you satisfied with any cooperation received from Eritreans so far? Will you be approaching non-Eritreans?

A: We will look at the cooperation, we'll look at whether this is consistent with the information we are hearing from other groups and other individuals. That is how we measure credibility. If someone makes a sort of suggestion that is odd and completely different from any other we are hearing, then we put a question mark on that information.

Q11: Are you will willing to accept support from civil society groups and activities? If so how do you foresee such a cooperation to be?

Well we welcome any cooperating with civil society. Civil society plays a norms and important part in disseminating information in the work of the commission and encourages people to co-operate through the submission of written testimony and also rallying people to come to places where we're visiting to come and be interviewed by us. So we already regarded this issue as extremely important. Civil society organizations are also important and very helpful explaining the mandate and aim and the scope of the commission of enquiry. So that people don't in one hand have unreasonable expectations of it and in the other hand understand what it might be able to do.

Q12: Finally are you satisfied with any cooperation received from Eritreans so far? Will you be approaching non-Eritreans?

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A: We are very satisfied with the co-operations we received from Eritreans. We met Eritrean organizations that helped us in our work so far. But of course as said earlier waiting to see if the Eritrean government will be willing to cooperate with us. If non Eritrean wishes to contact us because they have got very relevant information they will be welcomed.

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