



RESOLUTION #3 ON ERITREA

On 23 September 2017, the journalist, playwright and writer Dawit Isaak will have been in prison in Eritrea for 16 years. Despite the many efforts over the years to raise his case at the international level, he remains arbitrarily detained.¹

Isaak was born in Eritrea in 1964. He immigrated to Sweden as a refugee during Eritrea's war of independence in 1987 and became a Swedish citizen five years later. When Eritrea gained independence in 1993, he returned to his native country and became a part-owner of *Setit*, the country's first independent newspaper. In 2001, Isaak was arrested in Eritrea and jailed together with other independent journalists, writers and opposition politicians after his newspaper published a letter which criticized President Isaias Afewerki. Despite serious concerns for their health and well-being, Isaak and his colleagues have been imprisoned ever since, reportedly without charge or trial, in extremely harsh conditions. PEN is deeply concerned at the reported deaths of detained journalists and the longstanding lack of medical treatment in prisons where Dawit Isaak has been held.

At least four, and possibly seven, of the journalists arrested in 2001 are reported to have died in detention. Their deaths – which have not been officially confirmed – have been attributed to harsh conditions and lack of medical attention. There have also been reports of Dawit Isaak's death but according to unverified information leaked in early 2016, he was among the few journalists who were still alive though in poor health.² The Eritrean Minister of Foreign Affairs claimed in an interview with Radio France Internationale in June 2016 that all of the journalists and politicians arrested in the widespread crackdown on dissent in 2001 were alive, including Dawit Isaak, though no proof has been provided. In the same interview, the foreign minister said that these men would be tried 'when the government decides'.³

The treatment of Dawit Isaak and the other imprisoned writers goes against fundamental principles of international law, including the right to liberty and the right to a trial within a

¹ PEN International. 'Take action for detained journalists in Eritrea'. <http://www.pen-international.org/newsitems/take-action-for-detained-journalists-in-eritrea/>

² Abraham T Zere. 'Facebook page vows to lift the lid on Eritrea's secret reign of terror.' *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/27/eritrea-facebook-page-sactism-human-rights-abuses>

³ Brenna Daldorph. 'Eritrea's foreign minister denies rights abuses, blames Ethiopia for clashes.' *RFI*. <http://en.rfi.fr/africa/20160621-eritrea-foreign-minister-denies-human-rights-abuses-clashes-ethiopia-disappeared-act>.

reasonable time after arrest.⁴ The right to freedom of expression under Article 19 is also directly violated, given that the government has arrested writers and journalists for expressing oppositional opinions and information. Further, the public has not been given access to information on the state of those imprisoned, which is also guaranteed by the right to freedom of expression.⁵

The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International calls on the government of Eritrea to:

- Grant the immediate and unconditional release of Mr. Isaak and the at least 15 other Eritreans who have also been imprisoned for their writings since 2001.

Pending their release, the Eritrean authorities should:

- Provide evidence of the well-being and current whereabouts of Dawit Isaak and all other arbitrarily detained writers;
- Ensure that all detained writers receive adequate health care and consider granting them access to independent physicians.

The Assembly of Delegates also urges the UN Security Council to ensure that the situation in Eritrea is referred to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, as recommended by the former UN Commission of Inquiry on human rights in Eritrea,⁶ and calls upon the African Union to establish an accountability mechanism.

⁴ International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9

⁵ Human Rights Council General Comment 34 on Article 19, at para 18

⁶ Report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in Eritrea, 9 May 2016, A/HRC/32/47, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/093/42/PDF/G1609342.pdf?OpenElement>