

MORE THAN 400 PEOPLE DEAD, AND UNREPORTED

TUESDAY, 12 APRIL 2011



Human Rights Concern Eritrea
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Human Rights Concern – Eritrea (HRCE) has in its possession a growing list of 336 people, mostly Eritrean, with 14 Ethiopians, who are missing and can only be presumed dead after the massacre of a refugee boat which had departed from Tajour in Tripoli at 5:00 a.m. on 22nd March 2011.

These men, women, and children were not soldiers or rebels. They were not armed. They had no way of defending themselves. No blame has been attached to the attackers, who remain anonymous. In fact, the tragedy has not been reported in the media. It is as if these people never existed. But each one was a living soul with family, friends and lovers.

As an organization with access to the names of the people on the boat which did not capsize, and so must have been bombed by air -as the evidence on the bodies which were washed ashore suggested- it befell upon us to take on the onerous and heartbreaking task of informing the kin of the people on the boat that they have gone missing although the boat had not capsized - in other words, that they are presumed dead. One man lost his fianc e, his brother, his cousins and his friends.

The list continues to grow. Even a tragedy such as this has become the norm for Eritrea where the leaders remain unconcerned that so many men, women and children would prefer to run a risk such as this rather than stay in Eritrea which has become a prison from which to escape, quite literally a prison for many of its inhabitants.

Another group, of 68 refugees, Eritreans and Ethiopians, is unaccounted for. We become blind to the numbers but it is impossible to be deaf to the cries of grief from those who have to be informed that their loved ones are almost certainly no longer alive.

And then there is another group of 200 Eritreans and Somalians who capsized on 6 April 2011. Only 47 survived. Only 20 bodies were found. More numbers. More tragedy. More grieving people.

The least that can be done is that the world should be informed each time this kind of thing happens. It will happen again, and continue to happen until the dictators who have wrought this state of affairs are themselves dead or imprisoned for life, and it will continue to happen while the humanitarian forces whose duty it is to try

to prevent these tragedies continue to accept an unacceptable situation. Since the

technology of radar and satellite is in place and can be deployed by NATO at any time, it follows that NATO must know what happened. If it's a question of "collateral damage", then we still need acknowledgement that it happened.

The EU, NATO and any institution that cares about human rights needs to conduct an investigation into this act of murder perpetrated by nameless aggressors.

There is no doubt that the boat did not simply capsize on 22nd March 2011. The bodies were not bloated, were not dispersed, and did not float to the surface as one would expect. Nobody knows what became of the boat itself.

As more names become known to us, more phone calls need to be made, more phone calls received from worried and distressed families who need to know the worst.

From the Eritrean Government's point of view this is business as usual: business because it's what always happens to many who try to escape – they die – and business because they fine the families of those who try to leave, or imprison them.

They gather names of victims by intimidating Eritreans in Libya so that they can get their commission on death. More deaths mean more money because they collect 50,000 Nakfa, which is equivalent to \$3333.33 (US Dollars), for each refugee.

Most of the dead were young. They were the future of Eritrea. Who will be left when all the young are gone, or dead?

We, at HRCE, mourn the loss of lives of all the dead: the Eritreans, the Ethiopians, the Somalians, and perhaps others not yet identified.

Elsa Chyrum

Director

London, 10 April 2011