

The Voice of a prisoner of conscience behind bars in Eritrea (by Elsa churum)

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Her voice is ours, her suffering too!

Eritreans are living under an oppressive regime that had turned the whole country into an undeclared open prison. Thousands of Eritreans are languishing under harsh prison conditions all over the country. Many Eritrean women became innocent victims, including veteran women fighters who have contributed faithfully to the creation of Eritrea, but are now separated from their children and detained for unknown reasons, in unknown locations. The following is a short story of one such Eritrean woman, who is still languishing behind bars. She trusted, but got betrayed.

Aster Yohannes: was a 2nd year Electrical Engineering student at Addis Ababa University when she joined the liberation movement in Eritrea in 1979. After a 6-months military training, she took a computer course and started work at Amberbeb military office, and stayed there till 1986. She then joined the ground forces. In 1989, she married Petros Solomon who was one of the influential members of the Central Committee of EPLF. They had four children: Simon (16); Zerai and Hanna (twins - 15) and Meaza (8).

From 1995 to 1999, Aster worked in Sales Department at the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources. Before she left for the USA in January 2000 (on a scholarship to study marketing), she served as deputy head, and later as head of the Fisheries Department. On the 18 September 2001, her husband Petros Solomon was imprisoned along with his colleagues for demanding change and democratic reform. Aster kindly asked the Government of Eritrea to give permission to her children to join her in the USA, since their dad was in jail, but the Government refused to co-operate. She later decided to go back to Eritrea to look after her children. Upon her arrival in Asmara Airport on the 11 December 2003, she was escorted by secret security guards, and was taken to an unknown location. She was not even allowed to see her own children. Prior to her departure from the USA, she was given assurances by the government of Eritrea that nothing would happen to her. It is so shameful for a government to imprison a mother who is returning from abroad to take care of her own children. To this day, her condition or whereabouts is still unknown.

Aster Yohannes sacrificed the best years of her life to fight for the future of Eritrea

Aster Yohannes bore four children because she believed in the future of Eritrea

Aster Yohannes left her four children to finish her education abroad for the future of Eritrea

Aster Yohannes returned to her four children for the future of Eritrea

On 11 December 2003, Aster Yohannes stepped not into the arms of her children and the future of Eritrea

On 11 December 2003, Aster Yohannes met the arms of Eritrean Security personnel and stepped into the black hole of an Eritrean prison that has become the future of Eritrea.

On the second anniversary of Aster's abduction

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