

ERITREAN COMMUNITY CENTER
590 SHAWMUT AVE, ROXBURY, MA 02118

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 3, 2013

Contact: Michael Eyob
Phone: 617-290-7664
micheyob@aol.com

ERITREAN REFUGEES RISK DEATH TO ESCAPE TYRANNY

The Eritrean Community Center (ECC) will host two internationally known human right activists for a special program on the exploding refugee crisis in the northeast African country of Eritrea at the Eritrean Community Center, 590 Shawmut Ave., Boston on Saturday, Jan. 19 at 4 p.m. The event is free and open to the public.

The event features London-based human right activist Elizabeth Chyrum and Boston-based author Dan Connell, who teaches in journalism and African politics at Simmons College. Ms. Chyrum and Dan Connell will address the refugee crisis and human trafficking ordeal of Eritrean refugees in the Sudan, Djibouti and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, where thousands of refugees are being held hostage today.



Ms. Elizabeth Chyrum is the founder and director of Human Rights Concern Eritrea (HRCE) in London, which has been monitoring the worsening human rights situation in Eritrea and the plight of Eritrean asylum seekers since 2001.

HRCE has documented and exposed the abusive practices of the Eritrean government, which appears at the bottom of most assessments of human rights and democratic governance. The organization has raised awareness by advocating, lobbying, documenting and conducting educational research.

Ms. Chyrum has also addressed members of the European and Canadian parliaments, the Commission for Human Rights, British human rights officials, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and other international bodies on the suffering of Eritrean refugees in Libya, Egypt, Djibouti, and the Sudan, highlighting "the pain of the people who make a bid for freedom by escaping from one country only to find themselves virtual or actual prisoners in another".



Prof. Dan Connell, the author or editor of eight books on Eritrea, is often credited with single-handedly bringing to the attention of the outside world the story of the Eritrean people's long struggle for independence from Ethiopia. He has traveled to the country often since 1976 and lived there for extended periods, reporting for the Guardian, the BBC, AP, Reuters, the Boston Globe, the Christian Science Monitor, the Washington Post, and other media in Europe and North America.

Connell was expelled from Eritrea in 2002 for criticizing the post-independence regime's appalling human rights record. However, he has continued to report on it, traveling to Ethiopia in May-June 2012 to interview Eritrean refugees in camps along the tense frontier between the two states, which fought a bitter war over their un-demarcated border in 1998-2000 that left close to 100,000 people dead.

"Tens of thousands of Eritrean men, women, children and elderly have fled unrelenting repression to seek sanctuary in Ethiopia and Sudan," Connell wrote in South Africa's weekly Mail & Guardian. "Eritrea currently competes with North Korea and Turkmenistan for last place on most assessments of human rights and democracy, and has become one of the largest producers of asylum seekers in the world."

Among the reasons for Eritrea's reputation as one of the world's worst human rights abusers are:

- Forced conscription and endless military service have caused a mass exodus of youth from the country. Female conscripts are sexually, emotionally and physically abused and are often made the servants and sex-slaves of military commanders.
- A human trafficking highway runs from the Eritrean highlands through Sudan's refugee camps into the Sinai desert, delivering Eritrean asylum seekers to Bedouin gangs who use starvation, electrocution, rape and murder to extort up to \$40,000 a captive from relatives in the Eritrean diaspora for their release, according to UN, Israeli and other sources who charge that corrupt officials in Eritrea and Sudan are collaborating in the criminal operation.
- Eritrean refugees whose families are not able to provide ransom payments are subjected to systematic abuse and torture, sometimes carried out during phone calls to family members, according to a recent CNN report, which says that some refugees have also been slaughtered for their organs to be sold inside and outside of Egypt (see [**CNN Freedom Project: Death in the Desert**](#) on YouTube).
- In a September 26, 2012 speech at former President Bill Clinton's Global Initiative Forum, **President Obama** identified Eritrea and North Korea as among the worst perpetrators of forced labor and human trafficking.

The Eritrean Community Center is owned & operated by Eritrean immigrants was established as a community based non-profit organization in Dec. 2000. It works to alleviate problems faced by Eritrean refugees and immigrants by bridging cultural and linguistic barriers and helping them integrate into the society. It also provides a forum to address issues affecting their country of origin.

Ms. Chyrum and Professor Connell, expert witnesses on both the history and the current crisis in Eritrea, will be available to meet with the media from 4 to 5 p.m. ahead of the public event at the Eritrean Community Center. For further information or to schedule an interview, contact: Michael Eyob 617-290-7664 or Berhane Haile at 857-334-3052. You may also send e-mail at: bhaile@eccboston.org