

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS
Green Party
for the South East of England

Commissioner Louis Michel
European Commission
200, Rue de la Loi,
B-1049 Brussels

2nd June 2009

Dear Commissioner Michel,

EU Aid to Eritrea

I am writing concerning the European Commission's European Development Fund's allocation of 122 million Euros of development aid to Eritrea.

Consistent reports and evidence are received that Eritrea is a brutal dictatorship practising systematic violations of human rights, including arbitrary arrests, torture, appalling detention conditions, forced labour and conscription, as well as severe restrictions on freedom of movement, expression and worship. For example, recently confirmed statistics indicate that at least 1,918 Eritrean citizens are jailed solely for their religious beliefs, without any access to judicial process. The brutal imprisonment without charge or trial of the Eritrean Gospel singer Helen Berhane for two and a half years at Mai Serwa military camp is just one distressing example of this. She spent most of her detention in inhuman and degrading conditions inside a metal shipping container which was used as a prison cell. The authorities reportedly tortured her many times to make her recant her faith. In October 2006, she was admitted to hospital in Asmara as a result of new beatings. She was released in late October but is said to be confined to a wheelchair due to the injuries she sustained to her feet and legs.

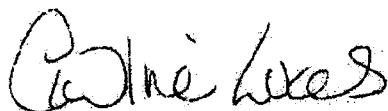
When the EU signed the Cotonou Agreement in 2000, it committed to respecting Article 9 which clearly stipulates that respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law must underpin domestic and international policies between the EU and ACP countries. This fundamental conditionality has not been respected at all by the Eritrean regime, yet the European Commission continues to irresponsibly grant aid to the country, thus legitimising such abuse.

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I urge the Commission to reconsider its actions. This is especially the case given that the Cotonou Agreement is up for revision next year. For constructive and long lasting development, respect for human rights must be regarded as non-negotiable. I ask that the Commission takes Article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement seriously, and firmly puts pressure on the Eritrean government to improve its human rights situation before any further financial help is given.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Caroline Lucas".

Caroline Lucas