

ERITREA UPDATE (11 July 2009)  
By Joyce Wolf

Tricia Hepner, Amnesty International Country coordinator for Eritrea, participated in the Eritrea Human Rights Symposium June 18-21 in Washington DC. Trish has not yet sent her report, but there's an interview with the event organizer at <http://delina.org>, in which he stated, "any conversation between the Obama administration and the Isaias regime will not be productive if it only dealt with the regime's involvement in Somalia. We strongly believe the wholesale suffering of the Eritrean people has to be the major part of the agenda." Photos of the march are at <http://www.gereger.com/pictures.asp>.

The new U.S. Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Johnnie Carson, said in a July 2 interview with AllAfrica, "After I took over as the assistant secretary, the Eritrean ambassador came to my office and indicated to me that it was the first time he had been into the office of the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs since he had come to Washington. I told him that the United States clearly wanted to see if we could return to a more normal relationship and that I was prepared to go out to speak with [Eritrean] President Isaias to begin such a dialogue."  
<http://www.ethiomeia.com/adroit/2543.html>

Let's write letters of support to Johnnie Carson and also put in a word for Estifanos Seyoum, the POC whom Group 22 adopted in 2006. I feel that individual letters would be more effective than a form letter, so here are my suggestions for some points to make in your letter.

\* Mention that you are writing about the Obama administration's desire to improve relations with Eritrea, and that you support Mr. Carson's recent efforts to engage Eritrea in constructive dialog.

\* Ask that the Obama administration consider the tragic human rights situation in Eritrea as an issue of extremely high priority.

\* Remind Mr. Carson of Aster Fissehatsion, Estifanos Seyoum, and the other former government officials known as the G-15 group, who have been held incommunicado in secret prisons without charge or trial since their arrest in 2001. Amnesty International designated them as Prisoners of Conscience because they were detained solely for peacefully expressing their political opinions. Several are alleged to have died while in custody because of harsh treatment and denial of medical care, but the Eritrea authorities refuse to release any information about their status.

\* Express your appreciation for Mr. Carson's attention and your hope for a response.  
Send to:

Johnnie Carson  
Assistant Secretary of State  
Bureau of African Affairs  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

And when you're all done with your letter, check out some Eritrean music and epic poetry at this link from Rights Readers.

[http://www.peoplespoetry.org/pg\\_home.html#](http://www.peoplespoetry.org/pg_home.html#)