

Press release

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Eritrean organisation summons the EU for use of forced labour

Amsterdam, 13 May - A case is being launched today in the court of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, that demands a halt to the European Union (EU) aid worth 80 million EUR being sent to Eritrea. The Foundation Human Rights for Eritreans has observed that the aid project financed by the EU aid relies on forced labour. The EU acknowledges this. This contradicts the most fundamental principles of international law and is unlawful towards the Foundation, which defends the fundamental rights of Eritreans in Eritrea and in the diaspora.

The Foundation issued a summons to the European Union in April 2019 and asked the EU to end the project, which looks to rehabilitate the roads between Eritrea and Ethiopia. However, the EU refused to stop the project, even as it recognises that forced labour was (and is) used in the context of this project. At the end of 2019, the EU announced that it would provide further funding to the project. The EU funding goes to Eritrean state companies, which use it to procure materials.

The Eritrean regime makes use of labourers in the Eritrean national service to construct the roads under the project. The circumstances under which the Eritrean population is forced to work in the national service have been described by the United Nations Human Rights Commission in detail: “Thousands of conscripts are subjected to forced labour that effectively abuses, exploits and enslaves them for years.”

This form of national service has been described as “enslavement” and a “crime against humanity” by the United Nations. The European Parliament has denounced it as “forced labour” and “a form of slavery”. The EU was asked by the European Parliament in January 2020 to “avoid situations where the EU could indirectly finance projects that violate human rights” with specific reference to the Eritrean road building project.

The EU claims that it has no responsibility for the forced labourers, as it “does not pay for labor under this project”, according to the European Commission. “The project only covers the procurement of material and equipment to support the rehabilitation of roads.”

The Foundation states that the support to a project which uses forced labour is clearly in contradiction to international law and asks the Amsterdam court that the project is stopped.

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Pictures available, among which lawyer Emiel Jurjens and the Foundation:

<https://www.belgaimage.be/#/gallery/6932089>

Link to the writ of summons and to the summary of the case:

<https://kvd.com/en/articles/eritrean-organisation-summons-the-eu-for-use-of-forced-labour>

[Projectfase 1-](#) €20 million - Action document of the European Union

[Projectfase 2-](#) €60 million - Action document of the European Union