

Responsibility stills falls squarely on the shoulders of the government of Eritrea

PRESS RELEASE

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The government of Ethiopia is delighted that the efforts of the Afar elders to negotiate the release of the two German tourists kidnapped by an Eritrea organized terrorist group on January 16th have been successful. The two were kidnapped when a group of 27 tourists travelling in the Afar Regional State were attacked by gunmen. It was an act of open terrorism resulting in the death of five people with others injured and kidnapped. Those killed were two Germans, two Hungarians and an Austrian. The injured tourists included people from Italy, Belgium and the UK. Two Germans and two Ethiopians were kidnapped.

Regrettably there has been no word of the fate of the two Ethiopians also kidnapped at the same time. The government will continue to make every effort to ensure the release of these two prisoners.

The Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is clear that the blame for the attack must be firmly placed with the Eritrean Government. It was a cowardly attack against innocent tourists which showed Asmara's contempt for the notions of international law. As usual the Government of Eritrea tried to put the blame on one of the supposed anti-Ethiopian organizations which it sponsors.

On previous occasions when tourists have been kidnapped, the Eritrean government had tried to use the prisoners as a bargaining chip in its diplomatic activities. This has been the case here. The Ethiopian Government in the interest of the safety of those who have been under captivity has been encouraging Afar elders to negotiate the release of the prisoners. The Government of Ethiopia's priority has been to cooperate in all efforts to secure their peaceful release. It has done everything it can, along with the German government, to ensure the elders' efforts to secure the release of the kidnapped Germans.

By contrast, the regime in Asmara has persistently prevaricated in an attempt to deflect attention away from its outrageous behavior. It appears that the regime in Asmara is still determined to play hide and seek at the expense of innocent civilians. While staging the release of the two Germans today through a “decision by ARDUF,” it has chosen to keep the fate of the kidnapped Ethiopians unclear. We can only hope that they are still alive. This is yet another mockery of international law.

The government of Ethiopia believes that this latest move by the government of Eritrea is yet another publicity stunt by the leadership in Asmara to deflect the international community’s attention away from its destabilizing activities in this region. The Government of Ethiopia would reiterate again that the responsibility for the fate of the two Ethiopians still held prisoner squarely falls on the shoulders of the Eritrean Government.