

THE QUESTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY: HOW WESTERNERS ARE COMPLACENTLY ABUSED

In his recent address to American Ethiopianists in Washington DC, Meles Zenawi is said to have commented that «in most countries it is recognized that there were two sides to every story. It seems that in Ethiopia there are many sides to every story».

There is perhaps no better example to illustrate this observation than the «Derg Trial», which some Westerners have hastily and abusively called «Nuremberg II» and hailed as an example which could serve other African countries.

As with many other issues concerning Ethiopia, Western attitudes, including those of Human Rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, are simplistic, marred with inconsistency and in sharp contrast to public opinion in the country itself. Our differences with those who stand for the fundamental principle of accountability for human rights abuses and for democratization and reconciliation in Ethiopia are in no way a call for impunity. All Ethiopians agree on the need to try all those who committed serious crimes against our people over the past 25 years. Misgivings and suspicions about Western attitudes stem from the latter's selective stand when it comes to accountability and their utter failure to even suspect TPLF's actual political motives behind the whole exercise.

TPLF's establishment of a Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO) to prosecute ex-officials of the Mengistu regime and members of its defunct party suspected of being «responsible for mass murder, war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity» was hailed by Human Rights Watch as «an extremely important part of the process of democratization and reconciliation»*. Amnesty International labelled the process «commendable» adding that «If they (the trials) were free and fair and do not result in executions, they will send a message to all perpetrators of Human Rights violations that they cannot expect impunity and will be held accountable for their actions. (Ethiopia: Accountability past and present: Human rights in transition, April 1995).

Reaction in Ethiopia to the whole process is reserved, to say the least. This is so because first, people are convinced that the call for accountability has nothing to do with the quest for justice but is only an alternative instrument of the victors. Secondly, because under the cover of «accountability», the ethnocentric one-party dictatorship

is actually trying to blackmail its opponents and is committing serious human rights abuses.

* Human Rights Watch/Africa: Human Rights in Ethiopia. Testimony by Abdulahi An Na'im, Director of Human Rights Watch/Africa before the US House of Representatives, 27 July 1994.

I. ACCOUNTABILITY, DEMOCRATIZATION AND RECONCILIATION

Human Rights Watch is «very supportive» of the aims of the Special Prosecutor's Office and claims that the objective is «to implement the fundamental principle of accountability for Human Rights abuses. As such, the process is not only of the utmost importance to Ethiopia, but also to the international community at large». Amnesty International is also supportive of the process but calls upon the government «to look more closely at its own record and deal with present as well as past abuses». It is clear from this and some pronouncements by Amnesty officials that by «past abuses», it is referring to human rights violations by officials of the defunct regime and that TPLF is only asked to «look more closely» at its present abuses. Such a «one-eyed» call for accountability is all the more surprising in that it comes from an organization which denounced human rights abuses by armed opposition movements during the late 80s.

Unless it is claimed that TPLF's 17 year march to Addis Abeba was a mass Sunday school picnic, its leaders must be held accountable for the thousands of civilians killed in cold blood in conflict areas and for the summary executions, torture and other atrocities committed against opponents within the organization itself.

The call for selective accountability made by these Human Rights organizations and Western governments is in fact in line with the position of TPLF and the objectives it has set for the Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO). This office is not set up to «implement the fundamental principle of accountability for human rights abuses» in general. While both the defeated and the victors of the civil war had committed serious abuses of human rights and crimes against the people of our country, the mandate of this office is to prosecute only former officials of the defunct regime. This is a far cry from genuine accountability. As is rightly pointed out in EHRCO's brochure: Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights in Ethiopia: Rhetoric and Practice: «If the Ethiopian people are living under the rule of law, then it must be demonstrated that violators of the law shall be prosecuted not because they are defeated but

because they have violated the law». In the second place, it is clear from SPO's practice and its terms of reference as established in Proclamation No. 22/1992 that the objective is not simply to «conduct proper investigation and bring to trial detainees». The Amharic version of the proclamation also blatantly states that «with the successful completion of the historic struggle» there is a need for «just punishment of the defeated». (Fiteh Yetemolabet firdatchewn endikebelu).

1. WHAT ARE THE CHARGES? ARE THEY APPLICABLE TO TPLF LEADERS?

Some 2000 officials of the former regime are held on charges including crimes against humanity, genocide, war crimes, arbitrary arrest and detention, summary executions, brutal offenses, embezzlement of property, etc. They are charged with the killing of 1,823 people including Emperor Haile Selassie whom they overthrew in 1974. The defendants are also charged with causing bodily harm to 99 people and disappearance of 194. They are also being tried for the «Red Terror» campaign in which thousands were killed in late 1977 and early 1978.

SPO officials say they have compiled 300,000 documents that include testimony from about 3,000 witnesses and videotapes of bombing and torture sessions. The prosecution also says it has gathered evidence of the strangling of people who were dumped in mass graves and whose remains have since been discovered.

Practically all the accused pleaded not guilty. In a show of defiance, some of the accused have refused to enter a plea by not responding to the judges' repeated calls for pleas.

The charges of genocide and crimes against humanity are obviously serious. These are based on the «Convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide», which states «In the present convention, genocide means any of the following crimes committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group as such». Defense lawyers have challenged the Special Prosecutor to specify which ethnic, religious or racial group was victim of genocide or attempted genocide. The Special Prosecutor cannot produce any reasonable evidence to substantiate its case simply because the crimes of the Mengistu regime were directed against the entire Ethiopian people and were not attempts to «destroy in whole or in part a given religious, ethnic or racial group».

As Professor Mesfin Wolde Mariam, Chairman of EHRCO, rightly noted in an interview with the monthly TOBIA (April 1995): «The charges of genocide and crimes against humanity do not reflect a fair and balanced view but an urge for vengeance. The crimes committed by the Derg regime are serious enough and have no need for exaggeration».

Rejecting the charges of genocide and crimes against humanity does not mean absolving the criminal dictatorship. For years, millions of Ethiopians lived under a brutal regime of terror and those who were responsible for war crimes, mass extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, torture, disappearances, etc. must be made accountable for their crimes against the peoples of our country. But if, as is repeatedly stated by all concerned, the objective of these trials is enhancement of the process of democratization and reconciliation, then, as was argued by some of the defense lawyers, «All those who had committed such crimes, brought damage to human life, freedom and dignity should be brought to justice without any differentiation between the victors and the vanquished».

It is obvious that this call for accountability «without differentiation between the victors and the vanquished» is targeted at TPLF leaders themselves. Did they carry out extrajudicial executions? Did they commit war crimes against civilians? Did they imprison and torture opponents or suspected opponents in their own ranks? Everyone agrees that these are crimes being committed by the EPRDF government now, and that they were also committed in areas controlled by the «liberation movements» during the years of the struggle. But not everyone calls for accountability.

During these years, annual reports by Amnesty International used to mention abuses, albeit mildly, by armed opposition movements. Although such abuses were only touched on and carried no detailed accounts of the human rights situation in the «liberated areas», they drew attention to human rights violations being committed by these movements. In the 1989 report, Amnesty noted «human rights abuses by opposition movements» and reported the mass execution «by an EPLF group of about 100 Afars who refused to join the organization». The next year, «Incidents were reported of EPLF and TPLF imprisoning or executing political opponents» and that «Armed opposition organizations were also reported to have executed prisoners and committed other abuses». In May, an EPLF group was said to have killed up to 200 members of the Afar ethnic group who refused to join the organization. The TPLF was reported to have executed two people - Teklu Hawaz, a former TPLF CC member, and Alula Tadesse, a journalist. The TPLF is also reported to be holding prisoners in a territory under its control, including Esteda Hadush, the wife of a former TPLF commander who had criticized the organization and Hagos Atabeha, the commander's brother, who was abducted by the TPLF in 1988 from Sudan where he was a recognized refugee».

In 1991, Amnesty International reported «opponents of the TPLF leadership were said to be still detained by the TPLF after several years and to be held in harsh conditions. There were reports of killings of government supporters.

Amnesty International cannot be blamed for not providing details on these «abuses» and «harsh prison conditions», etc. The fact remains however that these abuses did occur. The details can only be obtained from the victims themselves or those insiders who have decided to «speak out». In this issue of Addis Digest we are producing extracts from two documents published by two intellectuals with first-hand knowledge of TPLF during the years of the «liberation struggle» (See in our document section «TPLF: the Khmer Rouge of Ethiopia» by Haile Mariam Temesgen, May 1991, and «AMORA» (The vulture) by Gidai Bahrishum, published in 1993).

2. WILL THESE TRIALS ACHIEVE THE DECLARED OBJECTIVES?

The proclamation establishing the Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO) says the objective being pursued is to «record to posterity the brutal offenses, the embezzlement of property perpetrated against the people and to educate the people to make them aware (sic) of these offenses in order to prevent the recurrence of such a system of terror.» This is well and good. The problem is that the SPO does not have a mandate to «conduct proper investigations and bring to trial» all those who committed such crimes against the people in the last 20 years; it is only concerned with the crimes committed by one of the protagonists of the civil war. It is not established to administer justice to all and ensure accountability, but to «punish» the vanquished.

This fundamental flaw in the entire process makes it hard to see how these trials could send «a message to all perpetrators of human rights abuses that they cannot expect impunity» as Amnesty claims or how these trials could enhance «the democratization and reconciliation process in Ethiopia» as is claimed by Human Rights Watch—even if the trials were «fair in accordance with international standards» as these organizations wish them to be. It is already obvious that these trials cannot be fair. The SPO, which is being lavishly funded by Western governments, is not an independent body. It was created and is manipulated by the TPLF government and is accountable to the Prime Minister. This means that, contrary to the basic principle of justice which states «AUDI ALTERAM PARTEM», TPLF, which led a 17 year war against the accused, is judge and party at the same time.

While all those who stand for justice and accountability in Ethiopia advocate the straightforward idea of a neutral body with a mandate to investigate all past human rights abuses, it has come as a disappointment that nobody in the West has raised this fundamental issue. This, in itself, makes the Westerners' call for «democratization and reconciliation» in Ethiopia a move of «a questionable

morality» specially in light of the fact that in countries like South Africa, those same governments are applauding the establishment of a «Truth Commission» with a mandate to investigate past crimes committed not only by the apartheid regime but also by ANC. This obvious case of double standards has angered many in our country. As Professor Mesfin Wolde Mariam put it in his letter to the Swiss Ambassador to Ethiopia (see Addis Digest N° 2 May 1995): «What makes your Excellency's condemnation of EHRCO's plea for justice with peace and reconciliation very odd and of a very questionable morality is the Western stand in South Africa. There, you all preach peace and reconciliation, a stand which, by the way, EHRCO fully supports. For us you give instructions on style and «taste» and on battlefield magnanimity», condemning our stand for reconciliation as a «political move».

In an interview published by the Amharic monthly TOBIA (April 1995), EHRCO's Chairman further noted «The American and European governments preach peace and reconciliation in South Africa. The crimes committed by the Apartheid regime were close to genocide and crimes against humanity. But the people of South Africa have opted for reconciliation and decided to work together in the interest of everyone. But when it comes to Ethiopia, Westerners abandon this call for reconciliation and even help us with money in order that we may continue on the path of vengeance and division. This is totally unacceptable to us.»

This call for «peace and reconciliation» in Ethiopia made by Westerners including the above mentioned Human Rights organizations is all the more hypocritical since they should know by now that these trials are not «fair in accordance with international standards» and thus have become completely irrelevant to the «democratization and reconciliation process».

The UN Working Group on arbitrary detentions has declared several times that the detentions were «arbitrary, being in contravention of Articles 9 and 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 9 and 14 of the ICCPH and Principles 2, 4, 9, 10, 32, 37 and 38 of the body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment». It had called on the government to take «the necessary steps to remedy the situation, so as to comply with the provisions and principles incorporated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ICCPR. Human Rights Watch says it has «serious concerns about the unacceptable delay in charging and trying SPO detainees» and that «This delay threatens the integrity of the entire process». After declaring that «Internationally recognized guarantees of due process of law and fair trial are, of course, integral to the principle of accountability, and must rigorously be complied with», the statement of the Director of Human

Rights Watch/ Africa goes on: «We are concerned however, that the credibility of the whole process, both inside Ethiopia and with the international community at large, is now at a serious risk».

The «whole process» has never been credible in the eyes of Ethiopians. If Westerners were serious about their commitment to human rights and democratization in Ethiopia, the entire process would have lost credibility with them too, simply because TPLF is a one-party ethnocentric dictatorship which, by their own admission, is responsible for serious human rights abuses. Such being the case, it is hard to see how a regime which abuses the rights of ordinary citizens could be expected to conduct «fair trials» when judging its declared enemies! This, as we say in Ethiopia, is tantamount to «expecting a pigeon from a snake's egg».

As for the lesson from this process, EHRCO bluntly and rightly says «No lesson has been learnt from the cruelties and brutalities of the Derg, except perhaps that it was defeated». The only lesson to perpetrators of human rights abuses is that accountability only comes with defeat. If Western governments had hoped, as did Amnesty International, that if these trials were fair, they would «send a message to all perpetrators of human rights violations that they cannot expect impunity», then they must realize by now that no such «message» has been delivered to anyone in the country. It is ignored even by TPLF's leaders themselves, who continue to violate the people's fundamental rights, simply because they are sure they will not be held accountable for these crimes as long as they are not defeated and ousted from power.

II. ACCOUNTABILITY AND BLACKMAIL OF OPPONENTS

«Some of the recent detainees are opponents or critics of the present EPRDF government. The government has justified their detentions on the ground that they were allegedly involved in human rights abuses under the previous regime but has not specified the offenses of which they were accused». (Ethiopia: Accountability Past and Present. Amnesty International April 1995).

In its report, AI cites the names of the most prominent of these detainees, like Getachew Mengiste, a former police colonel and Getahun Ijjigu a former army lieutenant, Regional Governor and Ambassador to Sweden, both leaders of All Amhara People's Organization (AAPO), Professor Alemayehu Tefera, President of Addis Abeba University at the time of his arrest in April 1993 «during a conflict between the government and the university», Mr. Abera Yemane-Ab, leader of the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces arrested on 16 December 1993 at Addis Abeba Airport when he returned to Ethiopia to attend the Peace and Reconciliation Conference. Although these are the most known cases, it is believed that hundreds of other opponents and critics of the government (specially in the regions) are being held for

alleged crimes committed under the defunct regime and held for years without ever being charged.

Although everyone in Ethiopia knows very well that such arrests are politically motivated and the question of «accountability» is being used as a tool against current political opponents, nobody in the West seems to be aware of this problem.

These arrests came long after top Derg and WPE officials were detained in the wake of EPRDF's capture of Addis Abeba in May 1991. Some of them occurred as a result of «Public denunciation sessions» organized by the so-called «Anti-Red Terror Committees» created by TPLF. Ironically, the methods used by these committees have turned out to be reminiscent of the «counter revolutionary denunciation session» organized during Mengistu's Red Terror campaign, and the «Tsidat Zementcha» (cleansing campaigns) or the «Mintera» (weeding out) frequently organized in TPLF controlled areas during the «liberation struggle».

Derg and TPLF cadres used to come to these meetings with their own black list of people to be arrested or executed after being denounced as «counter revolutionaries» or «enemy agents». The cadres first created an atmosphere of fear and suspicion before calling on the people to engage in «criticism and self-criticism» exercises which, they claimed gave a «chance» for anyone present to stand up and denounce him/herself. Then the cadres (and now activists of the Anti-Red Terror committees) began to incriminate individuals. Now, as was the case in the past, nobody dares to speak in defense of any incriminated individual for fear of being accused of sympathy with «notorious» Red Terror activists.

Prominent opponents or critics of the present government are arrested directly by security forces acting on orders from the SPO. Some, like the detained leaders of AAPO, have been in the opposition since the EPRDF take over. They continued their opposition activities until EPRDF found AAPO dangerous, and decided to paralyse the organization's leadership. Leaders of the organization in the regions were simply executed by government agents. The majority of AAPO's CC - including Professor Asrat Woldeyes - are now under arrest. While those who had nothing to do with the defunct regime were jailed on fabricated charges, those who worked with the previous government were detained on «suspicion of involvement» in the Red Terror.

Some of the other detainees worked with the TGE until they criticized government policy and were suddenly discovered to be «Red Terror activists». Professor Alemayehu was named president of the Addis Abeba University until he criticized the government's handling of a student demonstration in early 1993. He was then fired from his post and jailed for alleged crimes committed under the former regime.

The most recent arrest of a prominent opponent of the government is that of Fitawrari Mekonen Dori. He too worked with the TGE for about two years as Vice-Minister before he became one of the leading figures of the opposition. Fitawrari Mekonen and his organization were expelled from the TGE's Council of Peoples Representatives in the wake of the March 1993 Paris Conference on Peace and Reconciliation in Ethiopia, which they supported. As Chairman of the Subcommittee set up to organize the December 1993 Addis Abeba Conference, he played a crucial role in the success of this historic meeting. He was arrested a few months after he returned from Washington DC where he participated in talks between the opposition and the government organized by the US Congressional Task Force on Ethiopia.

Mr. Abera Yemane-Ab was arrested with four other delegates from COEDF who were accused of «inciting violence against the government». Two months later, all the other COEDF detainees were released while Mr. Abera continued to be held under very harsh conditions. In April 1994, the Addis Abeba High Court dismissed the prosecutors charges and ordered his immediate release. The government ignored the court order and kept the opposition leader in prison claiming that his case had been transferred to the SPO which «suspects» him of participating in the Red Terror campaign of late 1977 and early 1978. As is the case with all the other opponents or critics of the government Mr. Abera is still detained without ever having been charged. (See our Politics section: «Who is Abera Yemane-Ab?»).

The SPO: An instrument for Human Rights abuse

Mr. Abera's case is a clear example showing how the SPO tactic is used by TPLF to continue abusing the fundamental rights of citizens. The charges filed against the COEDF 5—inciting violence against the government—had the «inconvenience» of obliging the prosecutor to bring charges within 15 days as provided by Article 109 (1) of the Criminal Procedure Code. As the government wanted to maintain Mr. Abera indefinitely while at the same time avoid being accused of human rights abuses, it was found expedient to transfer his case to the SPO.

In all cases under the jurisdiction of this TPLF establishment, any citizen can be detained indefinitely without ever being charged as long as he is «suspected» of «crimes against the people». Article 7(2) of Proclamation No. 22/92 establishing the SPO provides that the 15 day limitation for filing charges does not apply to cases which fall within the jurisdiction of the SPO. It must be noted here that this article goes against the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International

Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the Transitional Charter and the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia which all provide that «everyone shall be entitled to be tried without undue delay» or «anyone arrested or detained on a criminal charge shall be entitled to a trial within a reasonable time or released».

No one in the West, not even non-governmental organizations dedicated to the defense of human rights, seem to have noted this fundamental contradiction between the proclamation and the Constitution. Although some have complained about «delays» in the administration of justice for these detainees, none of them are on record for criticizing this article as illegal. The fact is that the way Article 7(2) is applied by the courts has already shown that this provision gives the possibility to keep someone in prison for life. On the basis of this article, all courts have rejected applications for a speedy trial or for bail. In their decisions, the courts did not even care to fix a time limit for the filing of charges and have given the SPO permission to detain persons indefinitely, not only to complete investigation, but also after the completion of the investigation. This simply means that if SPO does not want to charge the prisoners, it can ignore them and let them languish in prison for life.

This is the real danger facing opponents and critics detained by the SPO. The alleged participation of these opponents in the Red Terror or any other crime against the people can never be substantiated by serious charges against them. The government has cynically set — and Westerners unsuspectingly endorsed — a time framework which is intended to keep these opponents in prison for years. First, the SPO will bring to justice the top officials of the defunct regime. These trials of the top officials, and notorious criminals like Legesse Asfawa and Melaku Tefers, will probably take years. People like Abera and Fitawrari Mekonen will be charged and tried «when their turn comes». This simply means that notorious criminals will have a «speedier» trial than those innocent opponents held on «suspicion» of having committed crimes.

The case of opponents and critics under the jurisdiction of the SPO also raises a fundamental question which cannot be ignored even by the most zealous apologists of TPLF or the most unsuspecting observer of the human rights situation in our country: people like Professor Alemayehu and Fitawrari Mekonen Dori worked with the TGE for more than two years before they turned opponents and «Red Terror suspects». Logically, this should mean that, in order for them to be detained, the government must have found fresh evidence - which it did not have at the time of their appointment to high offices in the government - to suggest their alleged participation in crimes against the

people. The least one should expect is therefore that they be immediately charged. This is not the case.

The argument for not charging these and other detainees is that there are thousands of detainees under SPO jurisdiction and that «the country's human and financial resources do not allow the government to cope with the problem». Here again, many Westerners, including human rights organizations, seem to be carried away by such lame and dangerous arguments.

This argument is dangerous because, if we are to accept it, all that TPLF will have to do in order to delay and deny justice, without ever being accused of violating citizens' rights, is to incarcerate thousands more political opponents and simply claim that it has too many «suspects» in prison to deal with. Accepting such a ridiculous excuse is tantamount to providing unlimited possibilities to the ethnocentric dictatorship to promote its political agenda. It would mean that anyone having worked with the previous government, if not anyone present in Ethiopia during the Derg era, is vulnerable to indefinite detention.

IN CONCLUSION

Bringing to justice all those who committed crimes against our people can be «part of the democratization and reconciliation process in Ethiopia» — as claimed by organizations like Human Rights Watch, only if there is a «democratization process» in the first place. At present, no such process exists in our country.

The so-called transition period has ended with the establishment of an ethnocentric one-party dictatorship based on a text-book case of a Stalinist Constitution. Under such conditions, it should not be hard for anyone to see that the

SPO is not only an instrument of vengeance against the defeated, but also a tool of blackmail against an entire generation of Ethiopians who can fall under its jurisdiction if and when they decide to oppose or criticize the government and work for a genuine democratization process in the country. The call for «accountability past and present» by Amnesty International, other groups and Western governments can never be credible in the eyes of our people as long as past and present crimes committed by TPLF leaders are not taken into account.

Under the present circumstances, the on-going process of vengeance and blackmail will not give any positive lessons to the peoples of Ethiopia or to those in power. The governors are completely ignoring the «message» about impunity that these trials are supposed to deliver and are indulging in horrible abuses of human rights. The governed are crying for justice but are at the same time convinced that this will only come with the defeat of the ethnocentric dictatorship and the advent of a democratic order.

If they claim that defense of human rights is a matter of principle and not an instrument of foreign policy, the best way for Westerners to regain credibility in the eyes of our people and to meaningfully contribute to the reconciliation and democratization process is to see through the veil and denounce the whole process as irrelevant to peace and democracy in Ethiopia. As part of a principled effort to defend human rights, they should call for an immediate end to the use of the SPO as a jurisdiction to blackmail opponents and demand a fair and speedy trial or release of allopponents like Abera Yemane Ab who have fallen under the jurisdiction of the governmental body for having committed the «crime» of opposing the ethnocentric one-party dictatorship.

POLITICS

ESCALATING TENSION IN THE HORN AND THE RED SEA

SUDAN/ ERITREA/ ETHIOPIA ON A COLLISION COURSE

During his visit to the USA, Meles Zenawi continued to accuse the Sudanese government as being a main factor of instability in the region and that he had «reluctantly come to the conclusion that the Sudanese government does not look like a government that can be reformed», and that so far he had not been able to achieve peace with the Sudan through dialogue.

Officially, the Meles government accuses Sudan of violating the sovereignty of Ethiopia by planning and participating in the attempted assassination of Egypt's President Mubarak in Addis Abeba on June 26 as he arrived to attend the OAU summit there. While visiting

the US, he also met President Bill Clinton and the late Israeli prime minister and discussed the «dangers of Islamic fundamentalism in the region». This same «danger» was discussed with President Clinton who according to his spokesman, Mike McCurry, was «specifically interested in exploring Sudan's support for terrorism».

The reaction from Sudan was to accuse Meles and his FDRE government of playing an «evil role in the plot being hatched against it by America and the net that America is weaving to encircle Sudan». A government commentary carried by Khartoum Radio said that «Clinton's meeting with Meles should be understood as an American contract to repay the Ethiopians for being agents». Sudan's «encirclement» is all the more alarming to the Khartoum authorities since, for more than a year, conflict between this country and Eritrea has been escalating. The Eritrean government, accusing Khartoum