

Building Democracy in Eritrea Conference

Wednesday 24 - Thursday 25 April, 2019

Senate House
University of London



Building Democracy in Eritrea

The recent rapprochement between Eritrea and Ethiopia could mark a new era in relations in the Horn of Africa. However, Eritrea remains at a crossroads. The peace agreement between the two countries has led to many Eritreans asking why the road to democracy is still blocked. Demands for change and long overdue reforms are heard on the streets of Eritrea, as well as throughout the diaspora living abroad.

Building Democracy in Eritrea brings together Eritreans, academics and policy experts to discuss Eritrea's future. The conference will be forward looking; aiming to carve a way out of the difficulties in which Eritreans find themselves. Drawing on the best and the brightest, it will examine all aspects of life – from law to the economy – as a means of imagining the country after the dictatorship has ended.

Eritrea Focus

Eritrea Focus is an association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), human rights organisations, exile and refugee groups as well as individuals concerned with the human rights abuses in Eritrea.

The objective of Eritrea Focus is to draw attention to the horrific abuses and suffering of Eritreans, both within the country and as refugees living abroad. We campaign for democratic accountability in Eritrea and the establishment of the rule of law, and actively engage with the international community in our efforts to achieve this.

Eritrea Focus also played an important role in the formation of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Eritrea, formed in 2016. The organisation acts as the secretariat for the group, which brings together parliamentarians from across the political spectrum to discuss the challenges facing Eritreans.



Institute of Commonwealth Studies

The Institute of Commonwealth Studies, founded in 1949, is the only postgraduate academic institution in the United Kingdom devoted to the study of the Commonwealth. As a member of the School of Advanced Study, established in 1994, the Institute works with eight other prestigious postgraduate research institutes to offer academic opportunities across and between a wide range of subject fields in the humanities and social sciences.

Programme

DAY ONE	
09:00-09:30	REGISTRATION TEA & COFFEE
09:30-09:45	Chair's Welcome Habte Hagos, Founding Member and Chair of Eritrea Focus
09:45-09:50	Opening Remarks Thangam Debbonaire MP, Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Eritrea
09:50-10:20	Keynote: Winning Independence and Governing a State: Missed Opportunities and Lessons Learned Message from Haile Menkerios, Paulos Tesfagiorgios
10:20-10:50	Discussion and Q & A: Winning Independence and Governing a State: Missed Opportunities and Lessons Learned
10:50-11:05	COFFEE BREAK
11:05-11:45	Keynote: The Rapprochement Between Ethiopia and Eritrea Prof Kjetil Tronvoll, Dan Connell
11:45-12:20	Discussion and Q&A: The Rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea
12:20-13:20	LUNCH BREAK
13:20-14:00	Keynote: The Rule of Law and Administration of Justice Dr Bereket Habte Selassie, Dr Mark Ellis
14:00-14:35	Breakout Session: The Rule of Law and Administration of Justice Paulos Tesfagiorgios, Daniel Makonnen
14:35-14:55	Breakout Summary: The Rule of Law and Administration of Justice
14:55-15:25	COFFEE BREAK
15:25-16:05	Keynote: The National Economy in an Integrating Region Dr David Styan, Dr Tesfamariam Mehari
16:05-16:40	Breakout Session: The National Economy in an Integrating Region Dr Mehbrahtu Ateweberhan, Prof Gaim Kibreab
16:40-17:15	Breakout Summary: The National Economy in an Integrating Region
17:15	Day One Concluding Remarks Habte Hagos
20:00	DINNER

DAY TWO	
09:00-09:30	REGISTRATION TEA & COFFEE
09:30-09:55	Keynote: Eritrean Diaspora Working Together Prof Araya Debessay, Dr Asia Abdulkadir
09:55-10:40	Breakout Session: Eritrean Diaspora Working Together Selam Kidane, Dr Berhane Asmelash
10:40-11:00	COFFEE BREAK
11:00-11:30	Breakout Summary: Eritrean Diaspora Working Together
11:30-12:10	Keynote: The Empowerment of Women and Youth Abeba Tesfagiorgios, Vanessa Tsehaye
12:10-12:45	Discussion and Q&A: The Empowerment of Women and Youth Dr Sarah Ogbay, Feruz Werede
12:45-14:00	LUNCH BREAK – GROUP PHOTO
14:00-14:40	Keynote: The Media, Freedom of Expression and the Right to Information Abraham Zere, Martin Plaut
14:40-15:20	Discussion and Q&A: The Media, Freedom of Expression and the Right to Information
15:20-15:40	COFFEE BREAK
15:40-16:20	Keynote: Engaging with International Democracies John Stauffer, Prof Mirjam van Reisen, Habte Hagos
16:20-17:00	Panel Discussion: Engaging with International Democracies John Stauffer, Prof Mirjam van Reisen, Habte Hagos, Patrick Orr
17:00	Concluding Remarks Martin Plaut
17:30	End of Conference Reception at Senate House

Speakers

Habte Hagos

Habte Hagos is a Fellow of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants. He has worked as a Finance Director for a number of organisations over a period spanning more than two decades, as well as serving on various Executive Boards as a member of their Senior Leadership Team. He currently runs his own business in London. Habte is a founding member and Chair of Eritrea Focus. He led a two-year desk-based study into the extractive sector in Eritrea, believed to be the first of its kind, and he represents Eritrea Focus at a number of extractive sector forums, including the London Mining Network and Publish What You Pay (PWYP), a global mining transparency campaign organisation.

Thangam Debbonaire MP

Thangam Debbonaire is a British Labour Party politician who became Member of Parliament for Bristol West following the 2015 general election. Thangam studied mathematics at the University of Oxford whilst simultaneously training as a cellist at the Royal College of Music. She subsequently gained an MSc in Management Development and Social responsibility from the University of Bristol. In January 2016, Thangam was appointed as Shadow Minister for Culture, Media and Sport before resigning on 27 June 2016. She re-joined the frontbench as a Whip in October 2016, and currently co-chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Refugees and co-chairs the APPG on Eritrea. Thangam is the co-author of 'It Hurts Me Too': Children's Experiences of Domestic Violence and Refuge Life.

Ambassador Haile Menkerios

Ambassador Haile Menkerios served as the Head of the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU) and as Special Representative to the African Union, at the level of Under-Secretary-General, from 2013 to 2018. Haile previously served as the United Nations Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Sudan and South Sudan at the level of Under-Secretary-General. He was the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. During the period from 1991 to 2000, Haile was Eritrea's Ambassador to Ethiopia, the Organisation of African Unity, Special Envoy to Somalia and the African Great Lakes region, and was Eritrea's Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

Paulos Tesfagiorgis

Paulos Tesfagiorgis was a Senior Advisor on Democracy and Constitution Building at the International IDEA Regional Programme for Africa. In that capacity, he worked closely with the African Union Commission on constitutional development. He was involved in the drafting of the first post-independence Eritrean Constitution, and, subsequently, coordinated and chaired the Law Reform Programme (1997-1998) of Eritrea. He was also involved in drafting the first election law for Eritrea. Paulos was involved in Iraqi constitution making processes in Baghdad as a Senior Legal Officer for the UN. During the Eritrean struggle for independence, Paulos was responsible for relief and rehabilitation activities as the Chair and Director of the Eritrean Relief Association.

Prof Kjetil Tronvoll

Kjetil Tronvoll is a Professor and Research Director of Peace and Conflict studies at Børknes University College, Oslo. He has been researching and publishing material on political development, conflicts, and human rights in Ethiopia and Eritrea since the late 1980s. Kjetil has just returned from Ethiopia, where he visited the bordering Eritrean town of Zalambessa, to study informal cross-border relations. He has published extensively on Eritrea and Ethiopia, his books include *Mai Weini: A Highland Village in Eritrea*, *Brothers at war: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*, *War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia: The making of enemies and allies in the Horn of Africa* and *The African Garrison State: Human Rights and Political Development in Eritrea*, which he co-authored.

Dan Connell

Dan Connell is a Visiting Scholar at Boston University's African Studies Centre, and a Senior Lecturer in Journalism and African politics at Simmons College. His work ranges from Africa and the Middle East, but his main focus area is Eritrea. The cross-cutting themes are democracy, development and social justice, and the indispensable linkage between them. Dan has authored a number of books on Eritrea, including: *Taking on the Superpowers*, *Building a New Nation* and *Conversations with Eritrean Political Prisoners*. The latter comprises interviews with five prominent critics of Eritrea's shift to despotism, shortly before they disappeared into an Eritrean prison.

Dr Bereket Habte Selassie

Bereket Habte Selassie is a leading Scholar on African Law and Government. He is an activist for reform in Eritrea and a supporter of pan-Africanism. Bereket served as the Chair of the Constitutional Commission of Eritrea which drafted the first post-independence constitution of Eritrea. He is the author of several books, including *The Making of the Eritrean Constitution: The Dialectic of Process and Substance*, *The Crown and The Pen: The Memoirs of a Lawyer Turned Rebel* and *Wounded Nation: How a Once Promising Eritrea Was Betrayed and Its Future Compromised*.

Dr Mark S. Ellis

Mark Ellis is the Executive Director of the International Bar Association (IBA). The IBA is comprised of more than 190 national bar associations, major international law firms and 80,000 members from around the world. Prior to joining the IBA, he spent ten years as the first Executive Director of the Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (CEELI), a project of the American Bar Association (ABA). Providing technical legal assistance to twenty-eight countries in Central Europe and the former Soviet Union, and to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, CEELI remains one of the most extensive international pro bono legal assistance project ever undertaken by the US legal community. Mark served as Legal Advisor to the Independent International Commission on Kosovo, chaired by Justice Richard J Goldstone and was appointed by OSCE to advise on the creation of Serbia's War Crimes Tribunal. He was actively involved with the Iraqi High Tribunal and also acted as legal consultant to the defence team of Nuon Chea at the Cambodian War Crimes Tribunal (ECCC).

Dr David Styan

David Styan teaches International Relations at Birkbeck College, University of London. His teaching covers the Development of Post-Colonial States, and Democracy and authoritarianism. He has a DEA from the Centre of African Studies in Bordeaux, and a PhD from in International Relations from the London School of Economics. He has written extensively on the Horn of Africa, most notably on the Ethiopian economy as well as on the role of foreign powers in the Red Sea region.

Dr Tesfamariam Mehari

Tesfamariam Mehari is an Economics Graduate from the University of Asmara and University of Liverpool, respectively. He has acquired extensive

experience from various universities in the UK, Eritrea and even China. Tesfamariam currently serves as a Principal Lecturer at the University of Greenwich, where he has held various leadership posts and conducts regular visits to China, Africa, India, Malaysia and Singapore. He regularly contributes to policy debates in various forums including Chatham House, International conferences and media outlets such as the BBC and Voice of America.

Prof Araya Debessay

Araya Debessay is a Professor of Accounting at the University of Delaware, USA, where he has served for over 40 years. He holds BCom, MS, MBA and PHD degrees. Araya has won several teaching awards and is a member of the Delaware Board of Accountancy as well as being a member of the Audit Committee of Delaware Pension Fund. He is a member of the Global Initiative to Empower Eritrean Grassroots Movement and Eritrean Global Solidarity for National Dialogue. He was a member of G-13 which wrote the Berlin Manifesto, urging President Isaias to implement the constitution.

Dr Asia Abdulkadir

Asia Abdulkadir has a PhD in Educational Science from the University of Bonn, Germany.

She has worked as a gender consultant for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), where she developed manuals and conducted relevant assessment research. She was a Programme Manager for Chief of Party (Mercy Corps Somalia) and is the Country Coordinator of the German aid organisation, Kindernothilfe, for Somaliland. She is also the Chairwoman of the Network of Eritrean Women.

Abeba Tesfagiorgis

Abeba Tesfagiorgis holds a Bachelor's degree in World Issues and a Master's degree in International and Intercultural Management. Abeba has previously worked for Ethiopian Airlines in Asmara and for the World Bank in Washington DC. She is the co-founder of YMCA in Asmara and has served two terms as its President. She has also served as the President of The Relief and Rehabilitation Association of Eritrea from 1974-1975. Abeba was imprisoned for her involvement in the Eritrean Liberation Movement and upon her release migrated to the USA where she joined the Initiative of Change. After Eritrea gained independence in 1991, Abeba returned to her homeland and worked for the Regional Centre of Human Rights and Development until it was shut down by the Government. She is a human rights activist and the

author of three books, one of which is in English and titled *A Painful Season and a Stubborn Hope: The Odyssey of an Eritrean Mother*.

Vanessa Tsehaye

Vanessa Tsehaye is currently a Law student at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), and serves as a One Young World Ambassador. In 2013, when she was only sixteen years old, Vanessa founded One Day Seyoum, a human rights organisation that campaigns for the release of her uncle, journalist Seyoum Tsehaye, and all others who have unjustly been incarcerated. One Day Seyoum also oversees the Free Eritrea campaign which raises awareness about human rights violations in Eritrea. Vanessa's efforts were rewarded by the Dawit Isaaq Prize in 2013, and she was nominated for the Index on Censorship's Freedom of Expression Award in 2016.

Dr Sarah Ogbay

Sarah Ogbay is an English graduate and holds a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TEFL) as well as a PHD in Applied Linguistics. For 26 years, Sarah has taught undergraduates and postgraduates, and co-published academic articles. Her research interests include language, social identities, gender equity and human rights. She currently works as a freelance IELTS examiner at the University of Manchester's Language Centre. She is a secretary at the Network of Eritrean Women and is also on the Board of the Eritrean Global Solidarity for National Dialogue.

Feruz Werede

Feruz is a social worker and a human rights activist who campaigns to end human rights abuses in Eritrea. She has tirelessly campaigned to end the two percent tax and to stop slavery in Eritrea.

Abraham Zere

Abraham Zere is an exiled Eritrean journalist. He is the Executive Director of PEN Eritrea and is currently pursuing a PhD at the School of Media Arts and Studies, Ohio University. He currently works as a freelance journalist for a range of publications including *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Index on Censorship*, *Al-Jazeera* and *Africa is a Country*. From 2006-2011, Abraham was the Chief Editor of Hdri Publishers, a leading publishing house in Eritrea.

Martin Plaut

Martin Plaut is currently a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London. He was born in

South Africa and has degrees from the Universities of Cape Town, the Witwatersrand and Warwick. In 1984 he joined the BBC. He became Africa editor, BBC World Service News and retired from the BBC in October 2013. Martin has written widely about Africa and his books include Understanding Eritrea. He has advised the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the US State Department and the European Parliament. For two years he was an Associate Fellow of the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

John Stauffer

John Stauffer is the co-founder and President of The America Team for Displaced Eritreans, a volunteer humanitarian organisation, based near Philadelphia, USA. The organisation assists Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers in the U.S. and around the world. John has also served as a teacher in the U.S. Peace Corps in Eritrea in the 1960s. After a long corporate career, John resumed activities pertaining to Eritrea in 2006.

Prof Mirjam Van Reisen

Mirjam van Reisen is Professor of International Relations, Innovation and Care at Tilburg University and Professor of Computing for Society at the University of Leiden. She is the Head of Europe External Policy Advisors (EEPA) in Brussels and a member of the Dutch Advisory Council on International Affairs. Mirjam also serves as the Chair of the Development Assistance Committee and a member of the Board of Philips Foundation, the Dutch Development Organisations and Transnational Institute. Mirjam has authored a number of books including Human Trafficking and Trauma in the Digital Era: The Ongoing Tragedy of the Trade in Refugees from Eritrea.

Patrick Orr

Patrick Orr is the Executive Chairman of Raitt Orr & Associates. For over five decades, he has spent much of his time promoting African issues while providing services to African governments, UN organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). He has served on consultative missions of the UN-affiliated University for Peace (UPEACE) to Sudan and Kenya, and launched the UPEACE Africa Programme in Mozambique. In 2006, Patrick organised a major pan-African conference on the future of Africa's news media. He currently serves as a member of the board of the Eastern Africa Association (EAA), which covers Eritrea. He is also Chairman of The Kenya Society.

Breakout Leads

Dr Daniel R. Mekonnen

Daniel Mekonnen has a PhD in Law from the University of Free State. He is a founding member and current Director of the Eritrean Law Society, and currently works as a Senior Core Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study, Central European University. Daniel is the co-author of *The African Garrison State*. He served as a Judge of the Central Provincial Court in Eritrea (1998 to 2003), and as a Senior Legal Advisor and Research Professor at the Oslo-based International Law and Policy Institute (ILPI). Between January 2010 and May 2012, Daniel provided expert legal advice to Linklaters LLP, UK. Formerly, he was a Judge of the Central Provincial Court in Eritrea. Now based in Switzerland, Daniel tirelessly advocates for human rights.

Dr Mebrahtu Ateweberhan

Mebrahtu Ateweberhan is a marine scientist with interest and experience in coastal ecology and biodiversity conservation. He has extensive practical knowledge in biodiversity, the use mechanisms related to community based coastal conservation and climate change adaptation. His current work focuses on coastal areas in East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean Islands. He has taught university courses in ecology and environmental sciences, and has trained local managers on the integration of climate change into marine conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

Prof Gaim Kibreab

Gaim Kibreab is a Research Professor and Course Director of the MSc Refugee Studies at London South Bank University, School of Law and Social Sciences in the Department of Social Science. He has published widely on forced migration (refugees, development-induced displacement, internally displaced persons, and environmentally-induced population displacement), development and governance in post-conflict societies. Gaim has authored a number of books including, *Eritrea: A dream deferred* and *The Eritrean National Service*. He is currently working on causes of forced migration in post-independence Eritrea.

Selam Kidane

Selam Kidane is a psychotherapist at a specialist child and adolescent mental health clinic, where her speciality is traumatic stress. Selam has been a human rights activist for many years and has led and coordinated various initiatives including, Stop Slavery in Eritrea, a campaign challenging the indefinite national service, and Arbi Harnet/Freedom Frida, an initiative that works with activists inside Eritrea. She is the co-Director of Release Eritrea, a UK based Eritrean human rights charity concerned with religious persecution in Eritrea. Selam is currently finalising her PhD research which looks into PTSD and collective trauma among Eritrean refugees.

Dr Berhane Asmelash

Berhane Asmelash studied medicine in Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. After qualifying as a Doctor, he worked in several hospitals and health centres in Ethiopia. In 1993, after the independence of Eritrea, Berhane returned to Eritrea where he worked as a church leader and as the head of medical projects. In 1999, he came to the UK to study Theology and gained an MPhil. He is the co-founder and co-Director of Release Eritrea, a UK based Eritrean human rights charity concerned with religious persecution in Eritrea. He is also a minister in the Church of England.

Moderators

Michela Wrong

Michela Wrong has written about Africa for over two decades. As a Reuters correspondent based in Cote d'Ivoire and former Zaire, she covered the turbulent events of the mid 1990s, including the fall of Mobutu Sese Seko and Rwanda's post-genocide period. She then moved to Kenya, where she became the Africa correspondent for the Financial Times. Her books include *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, *It's Our Turn to Eat*, *Borderlines* and *I Didn't Do it For You*, which focuses on Eritrea.

AbduRahman Sayed

AbduRahman Sayed holds a Bachelor's degree in International Relations and a Master's degree in Comparative Federalism, combined with Conflict Resolution. As a polyglot, he is able to speak Arabic, Tigre, Tigrigna, Amharic and English. He has been a human and political rights activist for over 30 years, and believes the two are intertwined and when achieved, can lead to a just, prosperous and democratic society. He frequently contributes to Eritrean and International media as a political analyst. His interest areas include federalism as a conflict management resolution tool, economic integration within the Horn of Africa and women's empowerment and leadership in the public sphere.

Andy Gregg

Andy Gregg is the CEO of ROTA (Race on the Agenda), one of Britain's leading social policy think-tanks focusing on issues that affect Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. He is the Chair of the Metropolitan Migration Foundation, and Trustee of the London Voluntary Service Council and Refugee Action. He has worked as a freelance consultant specialising in governance and evaluation, CEO of Charities Evaluation Services and London Advice Services Alliance with an extensive track record of working with refugees and migrants. Andy edited the Eritrea Support Committee newsletter in the 1980s and he is currently involved in campaigning for human rights in Eritrea through Eritrea Focus and other grassroots campaigns.

Dr Fessehaye Woldesus

Fessehaye Woldesus is a Senior Research Associate in the Department of Chemical Engineering at Imperial College London. Prior to his current position, he had worked at the Universities of Cambridge, Loughborough and Liverpool. His current research interest is sustainable energy, climate change and the environment. As a critic of the Eritrean government, its policies and human rights record, Dr Fessehaye has been an active facilitator of discussion forums within the Eritrean diaspora which aim to bring consensus among the many disparate views of varying Eritrean groups. He is a former member of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), and was a leading activist within the General Union of Eritrean Students.

Contact information

Eritrea Focus

Website: <https://eritrea-focus.org/>

E-mail: info@eritrea-focus.org

Institute of Commonwealth Studies

Website: <https://commonwealth.sas.ac.uk/>

E-mail: ics@sas.ac.uk

