

Timnit Abraha (Student)
c/o Rachel Hughes (School Chaplain)
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Dear Bishop Arnold,

I am writing to you as a student at one of your schools and as a young refugee, originally from Eritrea, to raise with you the plight of those I have left behind. I hope that you will be able to raise the profile of their suffering and help me to push for change.

I have recently returned from a visit back to Eritrea and have seen first-hand how much conditions have deteriorated since I left the country, to live in the UK in 2010.

You may already know about the terrible conditions in Eritrea and that in June 2015, a United Nations-appointed commission of inquiry warned that the dream of a democratic Eritrea now seems more distant than ever. President Isaias Afewerki and the Eritrean Government have never held free elections. Tens of thousands of Eritreans are imprisoned, often without charge, and for indeterminate periods. Most Eritreans are forced into open-ended National Service (a form of modern-day slavery), often in harsh and inhumane conditions.

However, what I wanted to stress to you today, in my letter, is how this poverty and poor human rights looks on the ground; the human face of this terrible situation. I visited the country in Summer 2015. Seeing all the people, especially my own friends and family in such terrible poverty haunts me still. All the things that we take for granted are missing for them: they have very little food and water. Electricity is only on about once a week, for just a few hours. Water is delivered only every two weeks. Schools and hospitals can't operate properly under these conditions. The lack of sanitation means that girls leave school once they start to menstruate and then spend their time searching for and fetching water, sometimes from miles away. This is the situation for my cousins and friends and I really worry especially for my 19 year old pregnant cousin.

I would like to encourage my fellow young refugees that we can help to change things back home by speaking out and raising the profile of the suffering of our friends and families. This will hopefully encourage governments and the international community to increase the pressure on President Isaias Afewerki and to bring real change to my beautiful country.

I would be very grateful for your help and advice about what I can do to give these young people a voice and for any help that you can give in raising the profile of this issue and calling for elections, an end to conscription and an improvement in human rights in Eritrea.

Yours Sincerely,

Timnit Abraha

