

# The Summer PFDJ Died – A Dossier

By Habte Hagos

## Introduction

The summer of 2022 saw an unprecedented challenge to the grip that the Eritrean ruling party, the inaptly named “People’s Front for Democracy and Justice” [or PFDJ] exercises over the Eritrean population dispersed around the world. Perhaps as many as a quarter of all Eritreans currently live in exile, having fled the intense repression that has blighted the nation that won its independence from Ethiopia in 1993. No-one can be sure of the numbers. There has been no modern census of its estimated 3 to 4 million population, which is ruthlessly ruled by President Isaias Afwerki.

Eritrea is effectively “owned and controlled” by the self-declared president and his tiny clique, who have never held an election of any kind. The president openly declared there will be no election in the country for “generations”. He and his associates run the country in much the same way as mafia gangs operate. It is a one-party state with no functioning constitution, freedom of expression or independent media. There is no independent judiciary and tens of thousands of people locked in prisons (some in shipping containers) for decades, without due process of law.

This is what PFDJ stands for; it an organisation without principles or ideology, purely focused on the survival of the president and his inner circles through the grotesque oppression of its own people. The regime is the worst kind of dictatorship. Recently the former US Head of Mission in Asmara rightly described Eritrea as a “human rights house of horrors”<sup>1</sup>.

One of the key means the President and his associates exercise their hold over the diaspora is through PFDJ run summer “festivals” at which the government uses songs and speeches to propagate its message. They say only the current regime can ensure the country’s safety and independence and that alternative views are treason. The festivals, which began in Bologna 1974, are also an important source of finances for the regime. It funds its repressive hold over the country as well as external aggression. Since November 2020 it has helped pay for Eritrea’s war against its neighbour: the Ethiopian region of Tigray.

But in recent years the hold of the PFDJ has begun to be challenged among the diaspora. The Eritrean people have at last risen up against the brutality and lies of the regime in Asmara and its extended, thuggish arm abroad. This dossier brings together evidence of the resistance worldwide to the PFDJ “festivals” and to President Isaias’s ruthless rule.

It might be a little premature to write a PFDJ obituary just yet but after this summer’s “festivals” fiasco it certainly is on a life-support, gasping for breath.

## About Eritrean Festivals

Like all other communities around the world, Eritreans like to party and there is nothing wrong with that. What makes the Eritrean parties different is that there is almost always a political perspective to them, especially since the armed struggle in 1961 and post-independence in

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<sup>1</sup> [Totalitarianism Is Still With Us, and Still Evil - The Atlantic](#)

1993. Annual festivals were first held in Bologna, Italy before spreading across Europe and North America during the 30-year armed struggle. Eritreans met in their thousands to have a good time but more crucially to keep abreast of what was happening in the field and of course to raise money for the struggle. These festivals continued after independence but increasingly became divisive as the regime in Asmara turned the country into gulag. The liberators become the oppressors, dividing Eritrean society into two camps: pro and anti-government. The pro-government faction dominated the political theatre through intimidation and threats for about two decades post-independence. As the years went by the political landscape begun to shift with the anti-government camp gaining the upper hand. That shift manifested itself in the 2022 summer festivals in a way never seen before, with the pro-regime diaspora completely overshadowed by the democratic forces.

In a recent article, Reclaim Eritrea described the people who attend these PFDJ festivals as “fools”<sup>2</sup>. This may not be the whole truth although all participants are certainly misguided. A careful look at the festival goers suggests at least four different groups:

1. *The innocent group* – this group has no interest in politics and could happily attend anti-government festivals. Their only interest is to enjoy themselves and have fun. They include the young and the elderly who largely live on their own and want companionship and a good evening out. They are the silent group and to a large extent the indoctrination that takes place in these festivals goes in through one ear and goes out through the other. This group represent roughly 50%<sup>3</sup> of those who take part in the festivals.
2. *The hardcore group* – these are embassy staff, including ambassadors, government officials, spies and bogus refugees. Most of these refugees have long and close relationships with the regime in Asmara and obtained their status in the West by deception. This group is the “brains” behind the festivals who plan, facilitates and execute them on behalf of their masters in Asmara. They probably number c. 25% of the festival goers.
3. *The youth group* – Eritrean youth are routinely and systematically brainwashed by the regime and believe passionately the indoctrination they received, even after they have fled the country. They find it difficult to accept that Isaias, the liberator, could end up becoming a monster, and believe their worst enemies are the ones across the border not the ones within who are hellbent to destroy their own country. These youth are the thugs who work under the command of the hardcore, and perhaps represent c. 25% of the festival goers.



YPFDJ – Isaias's Youth [brainwashed extremists]

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<sup>2</sup> [Festival of Fools: Stop Going to "Eritrean Festivals" — You're Supporting a Dictator - RECLAIM ERITREA](#)

<sup>3</sup> Based on the authors own observation over several decades and speaking with party goers.

4. *The opportunists' group* – they represent the individuals with personal interest in Eritrea - be it family, property or such like assets which the government can requisition if they speak out. They have no political affiliation, and some seem to have a strong dislike for PFDJ. This group is a tiny minority of the party goers but nevertheless active in these festivals.

### The 2022 Summer Festivals

The Eritrean government that organises the summer festivals through its Embassies and agents around the world claimed: “In Eritrean communities across the globe 2022 will be remembered for the huge and successful Eritrean festivals that have been held across Europe, America and other parts of the World and the unprecedented massive exodus of Eritreans to Eritrea for their summer holidays. Naturally, both events have caused unease and consternation in the anti-Eritrea camp”<sup>4</sup>. As always, the regime in Asmara has a problem with the truth and goes out of its way to misinform the Eritrean people by distorting the facts. It sometimes issues downright lies, as the events below demonstrate.

### Ethiopia

The Addis Ababa festival held on 23 to 24 July was organised by the Eritrean Embassy. The majority of Eritreans resident in Ethiopia rely on the Embassy to renew their passports, without which they cannot remain in the country. This was a pull factor for many of the festival goers. And of course, the regime used the opportunity to misinform them and boast of its economic developments in their country from where they fled to better themselves, earn a living and live a normal life.



### United Kingdom

There were two PFDJ festivals planned to take place in London:

#### *First Festival*

The first festival was scheduled for 23 to 24 July at the Christ Church Avenue, Harrow, London, HA3 5BD. Despite several late protests from democratic forces to Harrow Council, the Mayor of

<sup>4</sup> [Eritrean Festivals: The Bane of the Enemies of Eritrea. \(conseilafricaindesmedias.net\)](https://conseilafricaindesmedias.net/)



London and MPs the event took place as planned. The event as showed through various images by the organisers themselves was in fact a “paramilitary” event with “troops” in Eritrean army uniform and beret leading hate chants against Eritrean opposition groups and Tigrayans in front of minors.



Eritrean “Army Officers” salute government officials in London



Eritrean “Army Officer” salutes government officials in London



Eritrean officials surrounded by “paramilitary” in London



Eritrean “paramilitary” in London amongst women and children.

The photos above, published by the organisers, demonstrate the festival was not a “cultural” event as they claim but an Eritrean “military show” in a foreign land, the legality of which is questionable. These photos and others will be handed over to the relevant UK authorities to take appropriate action. They will also be shared with local authorities across the UK to create an awareness of what these festivals are about.

### Second Festival

The second London PFDJ festivals was scheduled to take place on 4 September 2022 at Fenwick Hall, 128 Wilmington, London SW9 9ND, which is a Lambeth Council owned property. The festival was billed to celebrate the 61<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the start of the Eritrean armed struggle against Ethiopian oppression.



PFDJ ad of the 4<sup>th</sup> September event



Lambeth Council Event cancellation poster

Following protests from human rights activists across the spectrum, Lambeth Council cancelled the planned festival and issued a statement saying “Thank you to everyone who alerted us to this event. The Tenants and Residence Association (TRA), with the support of Lambeth and the Metropolitan Police, has decided to cancel this event with immediate effect. Please be advised that no event will take place on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and that there should be no gathering of protestors as the hall is situated within a residential estate”<sup>5</sup>.

Enraged and humiliated by the festival cancellation, PFDJ decided to hold an event in the afternoon of 4 September outside the Eritrean Embassy, 96 White Line Street, London N1 9OF which it advertised on social media. This attracted the attention of human rights activists who campaigned hard to get the first event cancelled only for PFDJ to hold the same event in front of their Embassy. The event attracted around 100 pro-government supporters, but also equal number (possibly more) anti-government activists. These anti-government activists were by and large young people who had endured rape, torture, and enslavement, while witnessing their family and friends being killed by the regime. This is what they had experienced in Eritrea before they fled their country to seek protection in the UK. Understandably, tension was high on both sides. As is common in most such demonstration scuffles broke out attracting mainstream media and police attention. The police intervened and forcibly removed justice seekers and anti-government protesters, arresting some of them. The pro-government groups who support gross human rights abuses in Eritrea and elsewhere in Africa were allowed to continue with their events without interference from the police.

Despite the Eritrean London Embassy’s false assertion that the anti-government protesters were Tigrayans, led by the TPLF, they were all of Eritrean extraction. Most had served as conscripts in the ineptly called “national service” for years as slaves. To see the very same people who mistreated these youth at home now trying to inflict the same abuses on them in exile is what brings these “festivals” to a boiling point. As one of the youth protesters put it: “I escaped from the system [but these festivals] bring flash backs and this is happening in the UK. I am so confused”.

Unless the relevant authorities realise the strong feelings about these scam festivals and ban them for good someone may soon get seriously hurt or even killed.

## United States of America



<sup>5</sup> [Martin Plaut on Twitter: "BREAKING: The PFDJ festival in London on Sunday 4th in Lambeth has been cancelled. Another blow to Eritrean government's "festival of hate" to intimidate the Eritrean diaspora" / Twitter](#)



The Dallas festival, according to the advertisement, was organised by the National Council of Eritrean Americans (another arm of the PFDJ) for 5 to 7 August 2022. The festival was officially opened by Mr. Yosuf Saiq, Chairman of PFDJ in the Central Region, and Ms. Sofia Tesfamariam, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations, was apparently attended by 12,000 members of the diaspora and their friends<sup>6</sup>. It was reported that this single event raised c. \$1 million for the regime in Asmara to help sustain its war efforts.

The Americans under the Biden administration imposed various helpful and exemplary sanctions on several PFDJ leaders and enterprises in 2021<sup>7</sup>. Unfortunately, these sanctions do not seem to have been used to restrict these festivals and other fundraising activities, where millions of dollars are collected around the world to support the Asmara regime in its efforts to destabilise the Horn of Africa. The US sanctions have also not halted the collection of the 2% diaspora tax from Eritrean-Americans through intimidation and extortion.

## Netherlands

Eritrean diaspora and their friends in the Netherlands have actively worked for years to alert the authorities the purpose of PFDJ festivals with some success. To their credit, they have set good examples to other diaspora groups around the world how anti-PFDJ protests can be legally and lawfully organised.



The image is a composite of two parts. On the left is a poster for the 'AWEL SEID' festival, dated 13 August 2022, held at the Event Palaza in Rijswijk. The poster features a portrait of a man in a military-style cap and sunglasses, and text in Amharic and English. On the right is a screenshot of the Dutch Police website's 'Terrorism Report Form'. The website header includes the 'POLITIE' logo and navigation links. The form title is 'Terrorism Report Form' and it includes instructions for reporting a terrorism-related incident, such as 'If you think the situation poses a danger, call 112.' and 'Please fill in the notification form as completely as possible. Without this information, the police will have insufficient information to process your report.'

The Eritrean Embassy and PFDJ in the Netherlands planned to hold their festivals on 12 August 2022 at the Events Plaza in Rijswijk. The planned event was furiously challenged by human rights activists<sup>8</sup> and the relevant authorities cancelled the event fearing violence. The Embassy took the case to court, but the event cancellation was upheld<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup>. Following this, and fearing violence, the Dutch Police set up a hotline with a "Terrorism Report Form" for people to report PFDJ abuses and intimidation.

What makes the PFDJ festivals cancellation in the Netherlands unique and perhaps an example to authorities in other countries in Europe and North America is their police classification of the PFDJ threats under "Terrorism Report". The Dutch are correct to classify PFDJ threats as terrorism given the group appears to have "paramilitary" units in Europe. "Paramilitary" units took part in the

<sup>6</sup> [Eritrean Community Festival in United States \(US\) - African Business](#)

<sup>7</sup> [US imposes sanctions on Ethiopian, Eritrean officials over Tigray atrocities \(somaliguadian.com\) US imposes more sanctions on Eritrea over interference in Ethiopia conflict - JURIST - News](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Urgent call to Eritrean Embassy to cancel PFDJ Festival - or face legal sanctions - Eritrea Hub](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Martin Plaut on Twitter: "BREAKING: Court in the Netherlands refuses permission for #Eritrean festival this Saturday organised by the #PFDJ https://t.co/NKraUhyXDS" / Twitter PFDJ Festival in Netherlands cancelled thanks to Eritrean diaspora pressure - Eritrea Hub](#)

<sup>10</sup> [BREAKING: Dutch court rejects appeal against ban on PFDJ Festival this weekend - Eritrea Hub Dutch police call for information about intimidation at PFDJ Festival - under terrorism law - Eritrea Hub](#)

London event of 24 to 25 July and in other festivals in European brandishing what looks like Kalashnikovs guns and machetes.

## Sweden

The PFDJ planned a festival for 28 to 31 July in Stockholm where the Eritrean Presidential Advisor, Yemane Gebreab, was to deliver the opening speech. This was to be followed by an “entertainment” by Awel Seid, an ardent supporter of the Eritrean government, who propagates hate against anyone who opposes the regime, be they Eritrean or Tigrayan <sup>11</sup>.

The PFDJ festival plan in Stockholm faced fierce opposition from the diaspora and their friends with thousands of people taking to the streets demanding for it to be cancelled<sup>12</sup>. The authorities, fearing violence eventually, cancelled the festival.



Stockholm festivals cancelled



Asa Nilsson Soderstrom, Swedish politician

A member of parliament, Ms Soderstrom, wrote a letter opposing the use of a public space for the event asserting “Let’s Cancel this Year! We will hold a festival for Democracy next Year”. This brought unwarranted and vile criticism on the Swedish way of life and internationally accepted norms by Awel Seid who said, “In Sweden there are festivals of men who sleep with men and who marry men [but] an Eritrean festival is not allowed”. Not only does this individual preach hate against Eritreans and Tigrayans but he is also homophobic, just as his masters in Asmara are.



Awel Seid shouting hate in front of minors



PFDJ's backyard mini festival in Sweden

Following the cancellation of the halls rental contract, PFDJ organised a replacement event which was held in tents in a park at significant cost and hugely reduced revenue flow for the regime.

<sup>11</sup> [Eritrea's ruling party's Stockholm festival plans terminated! How it was done \(harnnet.org\)](https://harnnet.org/eritreas-ruling-party-stockholm-festival-plans-terminated-how-it-was-done/)

<sup>12</sup> [Stockholm's Rally Against the PFDJ Festival in Stockholm \(harnnet.org\)](https://harnnet.org/stockholms-rally-against-the-pfdj-festival-in-stockholm/) [Eritrea's ruling party's Stockholm festival plans terminated! How it was done - Eritrea Hub](https://harnnet.org/eritreas-ruling-party-stockholm-festival-plans-terminated-how-it-was-done-eritrea-hub/)

## Germany

PFDJ planned to hold a festival in Giessen on 20 August 2022 at the Hessenhallen. Anti-festival activities mounted a powerful, campaign including petitions, to get the authorities to cancel the event but were unsuccessful.<sup>13</sup>



Campaigners leaflet calling "no space for PFDJ"



First PFDJ German festival halted by police following violence

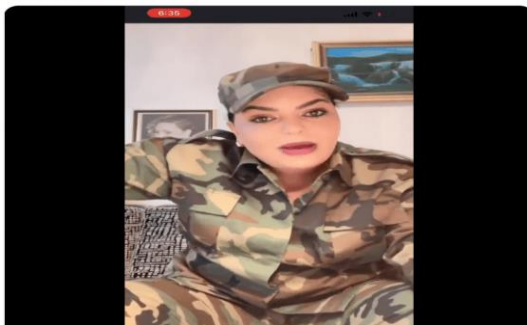
Eritrean diaspora and their friends took the issue to court, to try to get the festival cancelled, claiming the purpose of the festival was to spread "hate speech" against Eritrean activists and Tigrayans. But the court ruled in favour of PFDJ and the festivals were allowed to go ahead. The ruling enraged the anti-festival activists and a large crowd gathered outside the festival venue outnumbering the police, scuffle broke out with several people hurt and some detained. Police support from across the region was called in, but they were unable to contain the clashes. Eventually they had to instruct PFDJ to stop the festivals which they did<sup>14</sup>.

Outraged by the festival cancellation, PFDJ took out their anger on social media calling for the families of the protestors back in Eritrea to be "murdered"<sup>15</sup>

"We have to Arrest ALL their FAMILIES inside #Eritrea!!"

Says a Militarily cladded supporter of #PFDJ Regime, In reference to the YOUTH that protested outside their #FestivalOfDoom.

#PFDJ is holding Families in #Eritrea hostage, for Any Dissent in Diaspora.  
@Polizei\_MH



Calls for protestors families to be arrested and killed.

"If your FAMILIES in #Eritrea do not Condemn the Youth Opposition's Protest in #Giessen, #Germany, we will ANNIHILATE THEM!!!"

#PFDJ is holding Families in #Eritrea hostage, for Any Dissent in Diaspora.

@Polizei\_MH



Threat to protestors that their families will be murdered

<sup>13</sup> [Growing campaign against the Eritrean government's German festival – Martin Plaut](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Amanuel ERI on Twitter: "More Images of the Militant #Eritrea'n Youth that Stopped #PFDJ's Genocidal #FestivalOfDoom in #Giessen, Germany. Reorganizing after the successful mission. https://t.co/J3pEmmsNOe" / Twitter](#)

<sup>15</sup> [ስድሮ ጥቅልዎም | ስድራ ናይቶም ኣብ ወጻኢ ከይኖሩ ዝቃወሙ ዘለዎ ሙንክስታት ቅትለዎም ትብል ሞኒካ #Under\\_scoriopns Security | By Nomads Media | Facebook Furious at challenges to its control over the diaspora, the Eritrean regime threatens families back home - Eritrea Hub](#)



In support of PFDJ, incensed by the cancellation of the festivals in Germany and the huge revenue loss, the Eritrean Information Minister took to social media in a clear manifestation that these festivals are planned and organised by the regime in Asmara.



Yemane G. Meskel  
@hawelti

Press Release: Central Council of Eritreans in Germany

Acts of violence & hooliganism of this magnitude cannot be tolerated by any standards. Whole gamut of legal/diplomatic measures to indict the culprits and their sponsors are in the offing

Eritrean Information Minister Tweet



ዕለት 31.08.2022

### ኢጉዳሲ መግለጺ

እኒ ብዕለት 20.8.2022 ከካየድ ተሓሰቡ ዝበረ ብሰንኪ ግብረ-ጸይቅታት ዝፈጠርዎ ዕግርግር ፖሊስ ተሰናቢዶም ዝወሰድዎ ናይ ምክልኻል ስጉምቲ ኩሳ ዜጋ ባብወገኑ ብህቲብ ሓዘ ዘደሊ ሕጋዊ ስጉምቲ ኣብጊኑ ከምዘሎ ጉዳይኩም ስለዝገበኑ ግፊልጥም ጉዳይ ኢኹ። ህዝብና ብዘቐረበ ሕቶ መሰረት ፡ ዝምልከቶ ኣካል ነቲ ዝገበረ መደብ ባህሊ ዳግም ከግበር ኣዕረ ከካይድ ጸኒሑ።

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ኅወት ንሓፋሽ ፤  
ኅገራዊ ሽማግሌ ኤርትራውያን ጀርመን

PFDJ announces the cancellation of their second festival with no explanation

Undeterred by the first festival's cancellation and the violence that ensued, the PFDJ planned for a second Giessen festival for 3 September 2022. The anti-festival democratic forces who played a major role in getting the first festival cancelled started to plan ways of stopping the rescheduled festival.

On 31 August 2022 a local newspaper, *Giessener Allgemeine*, reported “The Consulate of the State of Eritrea has cancelled the festival planned for next Saturday (3.9.2022) in the Hessenhallen this afternoon without giving reasons to the city. The festival had been re-registered as a repeat of the event cancelled by the police due to violent clashes two weeks ago. The Giessen Public Order Office had reacted to the new registration with increased security requirements<sup>16</sup> ....” The newspaper added “The poet is depicted on posters wearing a military uniform and beret and is considered the regime's "chief propagandist" who agitates against its opponents. The conflict between the two groups is also likely to have been fuelled by Eritrea's participation in the war in Tigray, Ethiopia. The European tour of the Eritrean regime had recently received dampeners”.

The Mayor of Giessen who is responsible for the Giessen Public Order Office had apparently asked the Eritrean Consulate “to fix the festival start and end time”. In addition, the Eritrean Consulate was asked “to provide the number of participants and issue personalised tickets to the party goers as well as to put fences around Hessenhallen with climbing protection and instal entrance turnstiles”. Clearly, this structured and lawful festival arrangement is an anathema to a regime that rules through lawlessness. Since they were incapable of complying with the German authorities’ requirements, the Consulate decided to cancel the second festival, without giving any explanation. Another victory for human rights and rule of law, and a serious blow to PFDJ from which they are unlikely to recover.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.giessener-allgemeine.de/giessen/giessen-eritrea-fest-samstag-abgesagt-konsulat-umstrittenes-festival-ausschreitungen-91754942.html>

## Norway

The PFDJ Norway festival was planned for 3 September 2022 in Oslo, but activists were already prepared to have it cancelled<sup>17</sup>. To that end a petition was quickly organised<sup>18</sup>.



The planned PFDJ Oslo festival was cancelled by the authorities<sup>19</sup>. And following cancellation of the Oslo festival, Mr Ola Elvestuen MP met some 300 Eritreans. The MP said that he had written to the Minister of Justice [about these events]. But the answer he received was that the Minister of Justice could do no more than to ask Eritreans to report incidents to the police. Mr Elvestuen thought this was a weak reply and that he would follow up the matter in Parliament in the autumn.

Authorities in Norway are closely monitoring participants in PFDJ festivals. In the August 2019 festival, they investigated 150 refugees who took part in the pro-government festivals. Eventually this resulted in the withdrawal of 13 residence permit<sup>20</sup>. This approach is consistent with the 1953 UN Refugees Convention, which grants refugee status to people who need protection. It is clear PFDJ members do not need protection from a regime they love and admire and for whom they raise huge sums of money in support of its aims and objectives.

The Norwegian approach of withdrawing residence permits from PFDJ members, combined with the Giessen/Germany authorities' requirement for personalised ticketing of festival goers, are models that should be replicated by authorities across Europe and North America to weed out bogus Eritrean asylum seekers. It is obvious, PFDJ members do not need protection from themselves. Why grant them refugee status when they do not need any protection from anyone let alone the government they love?

## Switzerland

YPFDJ planned two festivals in Switzerland for the summer of 2022.

<sup>17</sup> [Mirjam van Reisen on Twitter: "#Eritrea Festival of Democracy & Peace 2022 in Norway today Peaceful demonstrations as #PFDJ festival inciting hate and violence dies a silent death Freedom prevails in Europe. No place for the PFDJ long arm of the Eritrean deadly dictatorship https://t.co/x3Ea4BDOzS" / Twitter](#) [Amanuel ERI on Twitter: "UPDATE - #FestivalOfDoom #Oslo \\*\\*\\*\\*\\* #Eritrea'n YOUTH meeting done. They now head to demonstrate against #PFDJ's Festival of GENOCIDE, Hate, and War!!!! More updates..... to follow https://t.co/1zH3Qj9YUI" / Twitter](#)

[Amanuel ERI on Twitter: "#Eritrea'n YOUTH against #PFDJ's #FestivalOfDoom had a peaceful sit-in demonstration in #Oslo. They are expected to demonstrate in front of #PFDJ's Festivities of GENOCIDE, HATE & WAR later today. https://t.co/v3rzoM82W0" / Twitter](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Petition - NEI til oppfordring til vold! NEI til hatefulle ytringer! NEI til krigspropaganda! av P · Change.org](#)

<sup>19</sup> The beginning of the end for the PFDJ in Norway - Eritrea Hub

<sup>20</sup> [Hate speech and threats at the core of Eritrean 'festivals' in Germany and Switzerland \(harnnet.org\)](#)



Young PFDJ Switzerland log <sup>21</sup>



The Governor of the Northern Red Sea Region opening the Sion festival

### *First Festival*

The first festival scheduled for 27 July 2022 was held in Sion and was opened by Ms. Asmeret Abraha, Governor of Eritrea’s Northern Red Sea Region.<sup>22</sup> She gave an extensive briefing on the “objective situation in the homeland, future programs as well as regional developments”<sup>23</sup>. The Eritrean Charge d’Affairs, Mr. Adm Osman said that “the big number of participants has added colour to this year’s festival”.

Unlike previous PFDJ festivals in Switzerland, this summer’s festivals were held in secrecy; the venue was not disclosed in advance and very little photos/videos were released, which made it difficult for the anti-festival activists to mount petition and organise demonstrations to get the event cancelled.

The “main attraction” for the festival was the Eritrean Defence Force, consisting of musicians, poets and political cadres who boasted about “victory” over the Tigrayans in the civil war in Northern Ethiopia. They chanted “hate speeches” against the Eritrean opposition and Tigrayans during their performances, in front of children and minors<sup>24</sup>.

Commenting on the festival, NZZ magazine wrote “The whole thing doesn’t look like a peaceful cultural festival. A band is playing on stage. But the dancers next to the musicians are wearing battle gear. The two men in army uniforms wield rather real-looking submachine guns. They clench their fists again and again and hold their Kalashnikovs in the air in a victory pose. There is a tent next to the stage, also here people in uniform. They praise the struggle of the Eritrean military and call for donations for the martyrs”<sup>25</sup>.

One wonders in the light of these events the presence of Eritrean underground “paramilitary” cells operating across Europe. Thus, the threat they pose, not only to the Eritrean diaspora, Tigrayans and human rights activists, but to members of the public at large. For this reason, this report and accompanying visual images will be shared with security services in Europe and other relevant authorities to ensure they take the PFDJ threat seriously before it is too late, and people are hurt or even killed.

<sup>21</sup> [YPFDJ Switzerland | Facebook](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Eritrean community festival in Switzerland – Eritrea Ministry Of Information \(shabait.com\)](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Eritrean Community Festival in Switzerland - African Business](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Appeal to the Swiss Authorities to cancel PFDJ festival \(mekaleh-eritra.org\)](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Where is the Eritrean dictatorship collecting money in this photo, in Africa or in Valais? - Eritrea Hub](#)



## Second Festival

PFDJ planned a second festival in Switzerland for 27 August 2022 in undisclosed location having witnessed various festivals across Europe been cancelled by the relevant authorities following concerted campaigns by Eritrean opposition groups and their friends.

This summer's festivals have been focused to glorify the war in Tigray, Northern Ethiopia, and to raise funds for the Asmara regime's war efforts. They preach hate against the entire Tigrayan population in some of the most degrading terms imaginable and throw abuses at Eritrean opposition groups in front of children. They hate Western values, while they like to chew American burgers and German sausages i.e. take material advantage of the West, and chant pro-Russia propaganda and support its internationally condemned invasion of Ukraine.

It is against this background members of the Eritrean diaspora and their friends campaigned hard to get the second PFDJ festival in Switzerland cancelled<sup>26</sup>. A formal letter was sent to the Directors for Justice and Police (KKJPD) calling for the festival to be cancelled, drawing attention to the heinous crimes being committed by Eritrean forces in Tigray and the suffering of the Eritrean people in the hands of the brutal regime for three decades. They appealed for the festivals to be banned adding "it cannot be the case that constitutionally guaranteed fundamental freedoms such as the right to freedom of assembly and expression are abused by [the Eritrean] dictatorial regime in Switzerland; Switzerland should neither serve as a propaganda target nor a collection point for illegal taxes to the Eritrean regime"<sup>27</sup>.

The Swiss authorities, heeding the warning of potential violence, hate speech and extortion by PFDJ, cancelled the second festival<sup>28</sup>. It is, however, rumoured that a much-scaled back event took place in undisclosed "private house" in Switzerland.

## Denmark

According to ATA media the PFDJ festival in Denmark took place on 3 September<sup>29</sup> where a group of largely elderly Eritreans can be seen dancing in a hall waiving the country's flag<sup>30</sup>.

A much larger anti-regime group can be seen demonstrating against the event, laughing and taunting the festival goers in front of the police. They shout, "down with the dictator and PFDJ" and accuse the party goers of "selling the blood of Eritrean youth". The demonstrators who are almost entirely young can be heard saying the party goers "were old, nearing death and that they were attending the event so their bodies can be allowed to be sent home for burial"<sup>31</sup>. A clear sign the Eritrean youth are the driven force in this summer's events, as they should be. The old guards are on their way out and they will not be missed.

## No Moscow or Beijing festivals

What is clear from the above festivals is that they were all planned to be held in the West (apart from Ethiopia), and that not a single event was planned for Moscow or Beijing despite PFDJ's adulation of the Russians and the Chinese. What's more, not a single Eritrean festival has ever

<sup>26</sup> [Amanuel ERI on Twitter: "Hundreds of #Eritrea'n YOUTH from #Germany travelling today to join their counterparts in #Switzerland to protest against #PFDJ's #FestivalOfDoom and Hate. The Festivities of HATE venue is still being kept Secrete. https://t.co/S2sj2n5xlp" / Twitter](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Appeal to the Swiss Authorities to cancel PFDJ festival - Eritrea Hub Appeal to the Swiss Authorities to cancel PFDJ festival \(mekaleh-eritra.org\)](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Eritrean festival in Switzerland cancelled - Search \(bing.com\)](#)

<sup>29</sup> [ATA Mediâ - Eritrean Festival Denmark 2022 - YouTube](#)

<sup>30</sup> [Abi Net - Eritrean Festival Denmark 2022 - YouTube](#)

<sup>31</sup> [Eritrea: ብርኪድ ንሓመዱ ኣብ ዱንዞርክ Eritrean Festival in Denmark 2022 | Eritrea News - YouTube](#)

been held in those two cities or anywhere else in Russia or China ever. PFDJ thugs flock to the West, claiming refugee status by deception, to butter their bread, while singing praises of these authoritarian regimes with forked tongues. They are void of humanity and ethics.

### **The lessons from the 2022 PFDJ summer festivals**

Perhaps for the first time in its history, the PFDJ/Asmara regime faced the most concerted and persistent resistance from members of the diaspora and their friends across Europe and North America this summer. This is a step in the right direction and should be hugely applauded. Not only has it stopped PFDJ hate speeches but more crucially denied the government desperately needed hard currency. It is hard to quantify the revenue losses to the regime due to this summer festivals cancellations. But given PFDJ is reported to have collected \$1 million in a single event in Texas, the author's<sup>32</sup> back of the envelope calculation of the overall losses to the regime from tickets, food, drinks, merchandise and donations could be as much as \$3 million.

#### **(a) Lessons for opposition groups in diaspora and their friends:**

- i. *The importance of non-violence* – despite minor scuffles, the anti-regime protests were peaceful, and in doing so managed to expose the evils of PFDJ more than ever before. The world now knows, if there was any doubt before, that Eritrean Embassies and PFDJ are the long arms of the Asmara regime that spread propaganda, preach hate in front of children, snatch benefits money from the poorest members of the diaspora and extortionately collect funds for the regime's never ending war efforts.
- ii. *Protect yourselves from PFDJ attacks* – the group is now at its weakest point and cornered with nowhere to go that could make them more lethal than ever before. This means, diaspora opposition activists and their friends will need to watch out for unprovoked attacks as happened on the streets of London several times before. In 2018, following attacks on journalists, Eritrea Focus published a piece titled "A dozen ways to peacefully protect yourself from PFDJ thugs"<sup>33</sup> which may now be worth a visit considering this summer's events.
- iii. *Information sharing on timely basis* – this summer has proved the importance of timely and routinely scanning for PFDJ events so that counteraction can be planned. The first London event referred above was drawn to the attention of activists a couple of days before the event itself which made it difficult to mobilise a robust campaign against it through petitions and demonstrations. A secure "Eritrean Festivals Reporting" online system is now actively considered and will be shared with activists in due course.
- iv. *The importance of engaging with the "innocent group" that take part in PFDJ festivals* – diaspora opposition members will need to carry out proactive "outreach" programme online and/or physically to genteelly persuade members of this group from taken part in future festivals.

#### **(b) Lessons for the international community and plea from activist:**

- i. *Ban all Eritrean festivals across Europe and North America* – there should be no place in democratic countries for the PFDJ to preach hate, display its "paramilitary" units shouting

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<sup>32</sup> The author is a Fellow of the Association of Chartered Accountants with extensive experience of cost accounting.

<sup>33</sup> [A Dozen Steps to Peacefully Protect Yourself from PFDJ Thugs – Assenna.com](https://www.assenna.com/a-dozen-steps-to-peacefully-protect-yourself-from-pfdj-thugs/)

abhorrent insults against fellow human beings and collect money for war efforts through threats and intimidation. Such barbaric acts not only are against the laws of each of the countries the festivals were planned for but may also be against international law. It is paramount that these festivals are banned for good before people are seriously hurt or even killed.

- ii. *If for some reason banning these festivals is not possible, they should be properly regulated in much the same way other festivals are.* The Germany authorities' requirement for the Eritrean Embassy to specify in advance the event start and end time, to provide the number of participants, issue personalised tickets to party goers, to install fences around the venue with climbing protection and entrance turnstiles would go a long way to mitigate violence in such events.
- iii. *Identify the "hardcore" refugees that organise PFDJ events* – the Norwegians, to their credit, took such a measure following the 2019 festivals in which 150 refugees were identified and had the residence permits of 13 of them removed. This is the sort of action required across Europe and North American. If countries can adopt the German stringent requirements for such festivals, identifying these hard core PFDJ elements should not be too difficult. There are millions of refugees around the world who need and deserve protection while PFDJ members are abusing the system. Why send innocent refugees to Rwanda when European countries have a readymade pool of bogus Eritrean refugees? It is clear these refugees obtained their status in Europe by deception which nullifies their rights.
- iv. *Is Eritrea a terrorist state?* – the question "is Eritrea a mafia state"<sup>34</sup> has been asked in the past and based on all the indications available, the response probably is in the affirmative. The question that the international community should now ask is whether Eritrea is also a terrorist state. This summer, the Dutch police called for PFDJ abuses to be reported under their "Terrorism Form" (see above) and this raises some serious issues which the international community ought to consider. What is clear is that the regime in Asmara will need to be contained and the sooner that is done the safer the Horn of Africa and the world will be.
- v. *Sanctions* – the Americans have led by sanctioning PFDJ and their enterprises in 2021 although, disappointingly, other countries have failed to follow. However, even with the US action in place, PFDJ was able to raise millions of dollars for the regime's war efforts by holding festivals and extortionately collecting money from Eritrea-Americans unhindered. The sanctions need to be extended and clarified so that this is no longer possible.
- vi. *Revoke Eritrea membership of the UNHRC* – it is mindboggling how one of the world's worst human rights abuser countries can sit on the United Nations Human Rights Council whose stated mission is "to promote and protect human rights around the world"<sup>35</sup>. Eritrea is a country that has consistently and systematically denied its people their human rights for three decades and caused mayhem by starting or getting involved in wars and conflicts in the Horn of Africa for decades, resulting in the suffering of millions of people. Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February, and 42 days later, on 7 April 2022, it was expelled

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<sup>34</sup> [\(PDF\) Eritrea: a mafia state | Martin Plaut - Academia.edu](#)

<sup>35</sup> [United Nations Human Rights Council - Wikipedia](#)



from the UNHRC<sup>36</sup>. This shows, if one is needed, the UN's inconsistency in the way its own policies are applied around the world. In the words of the US Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Linda Thomas Greenfield, one is bound to ask the UN; "don't African lives matter?".

### **Concluding remarks**

It is clear from this summer's PFDJ Eritrean festivals that they failed to achieve their objectives due to counter protests by hard working and determined democratic forces. This is a major milestone that activists should be proud of and something they should build upon to expedite the total demise of PFDJ. But this must be done non-violently and in line with the laws and norms of host countries. In the words of the former US First Lady, Mrs Obama, "when they go low, we go high". That's what makes human rights activists distinct and different from PFDJ thugs.

Secondly, the international community has a major role to play to contain this pariah state where engagement has proved futile repeatedly and it will never work. All PFDJ festivals should be banned forthwith, and stringent sanctions imposed to isolate the regime in Asmara and bring it to its knees. Only then will there be peace in the region, norms and decency restored.

17.09.2022

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<sup>36</sup> [Russia's expulsion from UN Human Rights Council has grave implications \(nationalheraldindia.com\)](https://www.nationalheraldindia.com)