



2 March 2020

Press Release

Eritrea Focus welcomes Canadian slave-labour ruling

Eritrea Focus welcomes the landmark ruling by the Canadian Supreme Court, allowing a case against a Canadian company (Nevsun) which is accused of using slave labour on its Bisha mine in Eritrea. This is a case Eritrea Focus has spent years working on, backing the legal team that brought this to the Supreme Court.

Our congratulations go to Gize Yebeyo Araya, Kesete Tekle Fshazion and Mihretab Yemane Tekle who had the courage and tenacity to bring this case. They faced pressure and criticism from the Eritrean government, but were resolute in their stand: justice had to be done.

They were determined that international companies should not be able to prey on the victims of Eritrea's notorious system of indefinite National Service – a system which traps conscripts in military service for years, sometimes decades. They fought so that others would not suffer the physical abuse that they did.

As they explained to the court: "Nevsun expressly or implicitly condoned the use of forced labour and the system of enforcement through threats and abuse, by the Eritrean military", and that it is directly liable for injuries suffered by the respondents as a result of its "failure to stop the use of forced labour and the enforcement practices at its mine site when it was obvious . . . that the plaintiffs were forced to work there against their will."

This ruling is just the beginning; the case still has a long way to go.

The Supreme Court ruling means that Canadian courts can now decide whether Nevsun was responsible for violating the workers' rights. We are confident that they will: the evidence is – in our view – overwhelming. Eritrea Focus will stand by Gize, Kesete, Mihretab and all others who are, and who have been trapped in indefinite National Service.

The ruling has important consequences – way beyond Canada.

There is a long tradition (particularly in the English-speaking world) of referring to judgements made by courts in other countries. If this case had been lost it would have damaged the chances of many other cases around the world.

We thank the legal team that tenaciously fought to bring this vital test-case to the Supreme Court. Now the case can proceed.

We will not rest until justice and the rule of law are established in Eritrea itself, and its citizens are never again subjected to this abuse!

The official media release from the Canadian Supreme Court can be read here:

<https://www.scc-csc.ca/case-dossier/cb/2020/37919-eng.aspx>

E: eritreafocus@oulook.com

Website: www.eritrea_focus.org

----- ENDS -----