



PRESS RELEASE
Stockholm, 6th of October 2025

SWEDEN MUST ACT: DEMAND JUSTICE FOR DAWIT ISAAK AND HOLD ERITREA ACCOUNTABLE

Betlehem Isaak, daughter of Swedish journalist Dawit Isaak, calls on Sweden to commit to justice

Dawit Isaak – Swedish-Eritrean journalist, playwright, and the 2024 Edelstam Prize Laureate – has been arbitrarily detained, incommunicado in Eritrea for 24 years, without trial, legal representation, or contact with his family. He is the world’s longest-detained journalist. The recent decision by Sweden’s Prosecutor General not to open a criminal investigation into Eritrean officials for crimes against humanity is a grave failure of justice. Sweden must send a clear message: impunity must end, and Mr. Dawit Isaak must be released.

The Edelstam Foundation strongly supports his daughter Bethlehem Isaak’s call for the Swedish government to commit to holding Eritrea accountable.



Dawit Isaak was born in Asmara, Eritrea, and fled the brutal Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict in 1985, eventually settling in Sweden. Inspired by Sweden’s democratic values and media freedom, Isaak became a prominent advocate for press freedom, human rights, and democratic reform. He returned to Eritrea after it gained independence in 1993, co-founding *Setit*, the country’s first independent newspaper, using his pen to challenge authoritarianism.

In September 2001, during a government crackdown on journalists and reformist politicians – known as the “G15 purge” – Dawit Isaak was arrested and hidden from the world. He was never charged with a crime and his whereabouts remain unknown.

Statement by Betlehem Isaak, daughter of Swedish journalist Dawit Isaak

Sweden needs to send a clear message

The Eritrean regime must account for the serious crimes committed against Dawit Isaak

The decision by the Swedish Prosecutor General (Riksåklagare, RÅ) Katarina Johansson not to open a criminal investigation against members of the Eritrean regime is deeply concerning.

It means that for over two decades now, Swedish judicial authorities have been unwilling to hold Eritrean officials accountable for the continuing crimes committed against my father, Swedish Eritrean journalist Dawit Isaak, and for other serious human rights violations perpetrated against the citizens of Eritrea, at home and abroad.



The ruling ignores an earlier decision by the office of the Prosecutor General from March 2015. This ruling found that the enforced disappearance of my father and his journalist colleagues in 2001 meets the standard of “crimes against humanity” and that a formal investigation of the charges against Eritrea’s leadership could and should proceed.

Notably, the Prosecutor General’s decision in 2015 came shortly after the adoption of a new law that in theory significantly strengthened Sweden’s commitment to the principle of “universal jurisdiction” – the idea that every state has a duty and a vital interest in prosecuting crimes against humanity.

Why bother passing such legislation if Swedish authorities lack the will to apply it and refuse to act in a case that directly concerns the prolonged mistreatment and torture of a Swedish citizen?

The statute affords Sweden with an important opportunity to protect and obtain justice for its own citizens. Just as importantly, it affirms both the legitimacy and the power of international human rights law.

My father, his colleagues and their families have endured unimaginable suffering.

Sweden cannot not remain silent. The Eritrean regime must be held to account for its egregious human rights violations.

One thing is certain: Without such efforts, my father will not be free, and Eritrea will continue to act as it has done since it gained independence more than thirty years ago – with absolute impunity.

Betlehem Isaak

Gothenburg, October 6, 2025

More information

PRESS PHOTOS can be found at: www.edelstam.org/international-press-room/

PRESS RELEASE 22 september 2025: "If my father is alive he must be rescued now" (including the letter to the Swedish Ambassador to Eritrea)

<https://www.edelstam.org/news/if-my-father-is-alive-he-must-be-rescued-now/>

OP-ED ARTICLE: October 6, 2025, in Göteborgs-Posten by Björn Tunbäck, Reporters without Borders (RSF): "Sverige ger grönt ljus för regimer att begå brott mot mänskligheten"

<https://www.gp.se/debatt/sverige-ger-gront-ljus-for-regimer-att-bega-brott-mot-manskligheten.7cab577f-8057-4b78-ae9c-9c6766571926>

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About

The Edelstam Foundation

The Edelstam Foundation administers the Edelstam Prize awarded biannually for exceptional courage within the defence of human rights. Further, the Edelstam Foundation encourages civic courage in Ambassador Harald Edelstam's spirit, works with formation of opinion and advocacy, education and information, research, and observation within the defence of human Rights.

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