



**EDELSTAM
FOUNDATION**
THE EDELSTAM PRIZE



PRESS RELEASE

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DAWIT ISAAK TURNS 61 – MARKING 25 BIRTHDAYS BEHIND BARS

On Mr. Dawit Isaak's 61st birthday, the Edelstam Foundation, the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights (RWCHR), and the Global Liberty Alliance issue in a joint-statement urging Sweden and the international community to act decisively to secure Mr. Dawit Isaak's immediate release, after more than 24 years incommunicado in an Eritrean prison. Mr. Dawit Isaak – laureate of the 2024 Edelstam Prize – has been imprisoned without charge, trial, or access to his family, in violation of fundamental human rights and the principles of the rule of law.



Swedish-Eritrean journalist Dawit Isaak was 36 years old when he was arrested in 2001. Today, he turns 61.

He has been held incommunicado for over 24 years without charge or trial, and without access to family, consular assistance, or legal counsel.

Eritrean authorities rounded up Dawit and nine other independent journalists as part of a brutal crackdown on free speech and internal dissent. Today, he and his colleagues are the longest imprisoned journalists in the world.

It has been a month since Swedish Foreign Minister Maria Malmer Stenergard met with Eritrea's foreign minister and demanded Isaak's release on humanitarian grounds. She also requested that he be granted consular access. There is currently no indication that Eritrea is ready to comply with Swedish demands.

Sustained and concerted follow-up action is urgently needed until these requests are granted and Dawit can be reunited with his family in Sweden.

Last month, we supported Dawit Isaak's daughter, Betlehem Isaak's public call on her government of Sweden to finally take decisive action on her father's behalf – before it is too late.

“If my father is alive, he must be rescued now.” – Betlehem Isaak, Dawit Isaak's daughter

We call upon the Swedish and international community and all human rights advocates to urgently intensify their efforts by calling for Dawit Isaak and his journalist colleagues' immediate and unconditional release and by demanding that Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki share proof that they are still alive.

Two years ago, the RWCHR partnered with several of the journalists' families to launch “Hear Their Voices”, a video campaign that amplified their call for justice.

RWCHR also filed targeted sanctions submissions in four different jurisdictions against President Afwerki and the senior Eritrean officials responsible for crimes against humanity against Mr. Isaak and his colleagues.

After three decades of repression, we call on the international community to hold the Afewerki regime responsible for its serious crimes committed against Dawit and his colleagues.

We stand in solidarity with Dawit Isaak, his family, and his fellow journalists.

We will not give up on Dawit.

We will continue to use every measure at our disposal to bring him home and to secure justice.

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.

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About our Organizations

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.

www.edelstamprize.org | www.edelstam.org

The Global Liberty Alliance

The Global Liberty Alliance is a US-based legal defense fund that works to strengthen and educate about the importance of individual fundamental rights, free enterprise, and the rule of law with like-minded advocates in the U.S. and other nations.

www.globallibertyalliance.org

The Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights (RWCHR)

The RWCHR takes on the most pressing struggles for justice, freedom, and democracy around the world. Founded and led by Irwin Cotler, former Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, we mobilize and engage a non-partisan, global coalition of parliamentarians, scholars, jurists, NGOs, activists, and students to take a collective stand for international justice and human rights.

www.raoulwallenbergcentre.org