

Implausible denials by Eritrea

Reuters yesterday carried a statement quoting unnamed “ARDUF leaders” stating that their organization claimed responsibility for the January 16th attack which claimed the lives of five tourists in Eastern Ethiopia close to the border with Eritrea. According to the statement quoted by Reuters : “ARDUF [confirmed] that those German nationals who were taken together with the Ethiopian soldiers are safe and in good health.” It added that “their peaceful release will be granted through peaceful negotiation ...through the Afar elders in the region.”

This is a new twist to Eritrea’s efforts to deny responsibility for its continued efforts to destabilize Ethiopia and for the killing of the five tourists at Erta Ale last week. Eritrea claims to support a number of supposed anti-Ethiopian organizations which it has itself created. It uses these as scapegoats for its efforts to destabilize Ethiopia. This time it has picked on “ARDUF” as its surrogate for its latest attempt at destabilization and embarrassment for Ethiopia.

Eritrea has, of course, been identified by the UN Monitoring Group as responsible for continued and widespread efforts at destabilization throughout the region through "operations using proxy forces that fall under direct Eritrean command and control falsely flagged as domestic opposition groups, in violation of resolution 1907." (UN monitoring group for Somalia & Eritrea report, July 2011, page 73). And there can be no doubt of its responsibility for this latest attack. The killers came directly from Eritrea with the intent to kill and capture, and returned to Eritrea as soon as they had carried out their attack. They knew exactly what they were trying to do – kill and capture tourists in an attempt to affect the image of Ethiopia just as the country is about to host the annual AU Summit. Just a year ago, Eritrea made an abortive effort to launch a bombing campaign to disrupt the AU Summit in Addis Ababa. This time, Eritrea has chosen to attack and murder tourists in its effort to embarrass Ethiopia.

Ethiopia deeply regrets that this action by Eritrea has led to the deaths of five innocent tourists. The Government and People of Ethiopia again offer their deepest condolences to the families of those who died. Ultimate responsibility for this atrocity rests with the government of Eritrea.