

July 16, 2012

## Eritrea Demands UN Sanctions Be Lifted

by Peter Clotey

Eritrea's UN envoy said Asmara has petitioned the Security Council to lift sanctions on his country after a monitoring group said it found no evidence that Eritrea supports the Somali-based Islamist militant group al-Shabab.

Ambassador Araya Desta said Eritrea has yet to officially receive a copy of the UN monitoring group's report before it was allegedly leaked to some media organizations.

"It's a pity we have not yet received officially the copy of the report. But, we have seen it in Reuters [news website] today that they have got a copy and they are talking about it," said Desta.

"We have been asking the sanctions committee to give us a copy of the report, [but] they said we cannot give [it to] you. So, we don't know what this report is saying."

Reuters reports that "Eritrea has reduced its support for the al Qaida-linked militant group in Somalia under international pressure, but still violates Security Council resolutions and remains a destabilizing influence."

But, Desta denied Asmara has supported al-Shabab.

"Definitely, I can assure you that the report was leaked to Reuters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia before Eritrea had a chance to see it. And, as indicated in their July 6 press release, the [monitoring] group said it has found no evidence to substantiate allegations that Eritrea supplied al-Shabab with arms and ammunitions by air in October and November 2011," said Desta.

"We have been saying all this that Eritrea has never given arms to al-Shabab and, even this time, they have come to say that they haven't received any evidence regarding this."

Last year, the Security Council imposed sanctions on Eritrea for violating sanctions imposed in 2009 by continuing to provide support to Islamist militants in Somalia, including al-Shabab. Asmara denies aiding al-Shabab or any other militant groups. But, in its latest report to the Security Council, the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea said it found no evidence that Eritrea supported al Shabab in the past year.

Desta said the "unjust" accusations were the basis of the imposed sanctions and demanded the sanctions be lifted.

"These were the main issues that [led] to [UN Security Council] sanctions [Resolution] 1907 [and], if that is the case, we request that the Security Council lift the sanctions," said Desta.

"We are asking the Security Council officially now, and before in writing, that what has been [previously] reported by the monitoring group was totally wrong and fabricated...And now that the monitoring group said it didn't find any evidence, then it is the duty of the Security Council to lift it."