

# DEG

German-Eritrean Society



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## Press release of the German-Eritrean Society (DEG)

The **ERITREA-FESTIVAL 2023**, organised by the "Central Council of Eritreans in Germany", successfully took place in Giessen at the weekend with several thousand participants - despite all attempts to prevent it.

The event is a gathering of Eritreans living in the diaspora to celebrate their cultural identity, the meeting of families, friends, old acquaintances, as well as with German and foreign guests. **The festival is a celebration of peace, exchange and international understanding.** Since 2011, it has already taken place in Giessen ten times, with the exception of the Corona years 2020 and 2021, peacefully and without any incident.

The cultural festival has a long tradition and was already held in Bologna/Italy during the Eritrean struggle for independence (1961 - 1991); since then, it has been held annually all over the world in all countries where Eritreans living abroad - almost one sixth of the total Eritrean population due to the flow of refugees from the long war of liberation - are distributed. It is obvious that Eritreans of the older as well as younger generation living in the diaspora have a great need to live their own culture communally, to enjoy the food, music and traditions of their homeland.

As peaceful, exuberant and joyful as the festival was on the inside, there were strong attempts from the outside to prevent it from taking place. **Firstly**, the city of Giessen's public order office banned the festival, which was legally untenable and was overturned by several chambers of the administrative court in two instances. **Secondly**, by groups of thugs around the violent Tigray cell "Brigade N'Hamedu", who followed up their threats on the net with deeds, so that on Saturday civil war-like conditions prevailed at the festival site and in the city centre with numerous injured civilians and police officers.

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**The DEG condemns these excesses in the strongest possible terms!** We are outraged that those responsible in the city of Giessen left no stone unturned to ban the event and thus undermine the constitutional right of peaceful assembly (**Article 8 of the Basic Law**). We are shocked that by stigmatising the event as "support for a dictatorship", an atmosphere was created which was used by the perpetrators of violence as a carte blanche and tailwind for their nefarious plan, as was evident from numerous interviews.

The continuous Eritrean "bashing" by city officials, especially in the Green parliamentary group, and part of the media, which has nothing to do with the realities in Eritrea and is essentially based on an aversion to the country's strict course towards independence, has contributed significantly to heating up the atmosphere and emotionalising it. We would like to point out once again that this is not an "internal Eritrean" conflict (friends of the government against opponents of the government).

The reasons lie deeper and are to be sought in the recent dynamics in the Horn of Africa, which the West perceives as damaging to its interests, and which found expression in the Tigray conflict and its ending. The TPLF regime, which had a stranglehold on Ethiopia for 27 years and is now at an end, is trying to externalise the conflict and take it to Europe to attract international attention. The attack by its thugs abroad on an Eritrean cultural event in August 2022, also in Giessen, and also the current attacks are an act of revenge because the Eritrea Festival 2022 could already not be prevented. The same thing has now been tried again. Ultimately just as unsuccessful, but on the backs of bystanders and the police.

The DEG calls on all those involved - whether on the governmental, administrative, media or other side - to thoroughly reconsider the policy of discrediting Eritrea and its people and to replace it with a willingness to engage in dialogue, cooperation and joint action in the spirit of international understanding and exchange!

The terrible events of the weekend in Giessen (which will be dealt with elsewhere) have shown one thing above all:

Restrictions and repression instead of prevention only make things worse - **the objectively existing problems, which no one can deny, can subjectively only be solved through understanding, dialogue and the will to recognise connections and backgrounds. It is high time to take collective action in this direction!**

Board of the German-Eritrean Society (DEG)

Frankfurt, 10 July 2023