



**5.15.18**

## **ERITREA | Minute of Silence Held at Vigil**

On May 17, CSW will join Human Rights Concern Eritrea, Release Eritrea, the Medhanie Alem Eritrean Orthodox Church and the British Orthodox Church to protest the continuing repression of freedom of religion or belief in Eritrea. The protest vigil, which will take place opposite the Eritrean Embassy in London, marks the 16th anniversary of severe restrictions on Eritrea's Christian community and the closure of churches affiliated to targeted denominations.

The vigil will start with a minute of silence for those confirmed to have died at the hands of the Eritrean regime since last year's protest, either in prison or soon after incarceration, including Evangelical Christian and mother of four, Fikadu Debesay, who died in August 2017, and two elderly Jehovah's Witnesses who reportedly died in early 2018 in Mai Serwa Prison near the Eritrean capital, Asmara.

During the minute of silence, those gathered will also pause to remember Rev. Stuart Windsor, CSW's Special Ambassador, and Irish journalist Luc Verling. Both men campaigned tirelessly for freedom of religion or belief in Eritrea prior to their deaths in September and December 2017, respectively.

In March 2002, the government effectively outlawed all practices not affiliated with the Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran or Orthodox Christian denominations and Sunni Islam and began a campaign of arrests targeting unsanctioned denominations that continues to date, and that also affects the officially sanctioned religious communities.

The Eritrean government is one of the most repressive regimes in the world. Its policies are responsible for thousands of Eritreans fleeing their nation on a monthly basis. In its June 2016 report, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on human rights in Eritrea (COIE) found "reasonable grounds to believe" that crimes against humanity have been committed by state officials in a "widespread and systematic manner" since 1991, including the crimes of

persecution against religious groups, and rape, repeated rape, and gang rape by detention officials.