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## ERITREA | Second Muslim Elder Dies in Detention

Haji Ibrahim Younus has become the second Muslim elder to die after an extended period in detention in Eritrea, following the death of Haji Musa Mohammed Nur in 2018.

According to local sources, Haji Younus, a septuagenarian and a member of the Executive Committee of Al-Diaa Islamic School in the Eritrean capital Asmara, died Jan. 30.

Haji Younus was detained during mass arrests that occurred in the aftermath of unprecedented protests against the detention of Haji Musa, a nonagenarian and the well-respected Honorary President of Al-Diaa, on Oct. 20. Haji Musa had opposed the government's attempted expropriation of the private school and its insistence that female students should no longer wear the hijab. He died in March 2018 in Asmara's 5th Police Station, where he had been held since his arrest.

Following his arrest in October 2017, Haji Younus was held in Mai Serwa prison near Asmara without charge, trial, or access to his family. Sources allege the harsh prison affected him adversely, and that he fell gravely ill around two months prior to his death, but did not receive timely medical attention. He was eventually transported to Halibet National Referral Hospital in Asmara but died shortly afterwards.

According to local reports, after Haji Younus died, prison authorities contacted his family, informed them of his death, and showed them his body. The family was also instructed to bury him without informing their neighbors or their community.

Haji Younus was buried at 2 p.m. on Jan. 30 by his immediate family. However, as news of his death became known, people headed toward the Muslim cemetery in Asmara, following reports that the burial would take place at 4 p.m. that day. However, police officers who had already surrounded the cemetery dispersed the crowd, informing them Haji Younus had already been buried.

In the National Report submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in advance of the third periodic review of its human rights record on Jan. 28, the Eritrean government stated that freedom of religion or belief was "protected by law," that "no citizen is imprisoned on account of beliefs, including religious beliefs," and that

most prisons have health facilities with basic laboratories, with inmates able to access “routine medical services from nearby dental and eye hospitals” or from the National Referral Hospital.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “We extend our deepest condolences to Haji Younus’ family, friends and community. The circumstances surrounding his death contradict the government’s assertions during the Universal Periodic Review. It is clear that he was detained without due process on account of his religious beliefs, and that he did not receive timely medical treatment. As a newly-elected member of the HRC, Eritrea must be encouraged to respect and facilitate fundamental rights and freedoms for all of its citizens, including the right to freedom of religion or belief; to end enforced disappearance, arbitrary arrest, indefinite detention and other gross violations, and to cooperate fully with UN mechanisms charged with the promotion and protection of human rights. In addition, Eritrean officials and security personnel stand accused of committing crimes against humanity since 1991. We therefore reiterate our call for renewed international efforts towards the establishment of judicial mechanisms to hold identified perpetrators accountable.”