

Augmenting Martyrs' Trust Fund



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Everyone supports the families of fallen heroes in Eritrea. The artist, using his lyrics, sympathises with the families of martyrs, encourages and admires them. Organizations give their moral and financial support, the general public pays emotional tribute, individuals help in any way they can and the government does its part as a policy, not only on June 20, but throughout the calendar year.

Every citizen accepts supporting the families of fallen heroes as a national and personal obligation.

June 20, the national official day to pay tribute to the fallen heroes, was made the official day to commemorate Eritrea's fallen heroes, because, that day in 1982 marked the end of the sixth and most extensive Ethiopian offensive resulting in the highest number of martyrdom. The Eritrean families whose daughters and sons fell at the battle fields to free Eritrea and protect its sovereignty deserve moral support and motivation. The people and the Government of Eritrea have been supporting these segments of the society in different ways. One way is the payment made by the Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare (MLHW) to the families of the fallen heroes, which is called as the Martyrs Trust Fund. Through the Martyrs Trust Fund a certain amount of money is paid by the government to aid the families of the fallen heroes.

The people and the Government of Eritrea emphasize on a deep commitment to assist families of martyrs so that they may sustain a normal livelihood. According to proclamation number 48/94, the government paid ten thousand birr every martyr. Later in 2003 and with a new declaration of 137/2003, the government started to provide 500 Nakfa monthly payments for every martyr. The monthly financial assistance serves as a safety net for the martyr's dependents – children, widow, and surviving biological parents. The government pays 350 million

Nakfa annually as a Martyrs' Trust Fund.

Children of martyrs have been provided with long-term support to enable them carry on with their lives smoothly. As part of this provision, volunteer extended families are given income-generating means to host children of martyrs and to take care of their education, health and daily subsistence. In short, the long term goal of the government's initiative is to enable the disadvantaged families of martyrs to attain sustainable and self-reliant economic livelihood. The financial assistance provided to families of fallen heroes is organized and efficient. Administration offices of regions check whether the financial aid reaches the expected recipient families.

Following the two proclamations, the MLHW introduced a well-organized implementation and monitoring of the aid program. The director of the department of Social Welfare at the Ministry, Mr. Zerai Tekleab, said that from January 2004 until March 2018, around 4.4 billion Nakfa was paid to families of martyrs. Families of martyrs located in different parts of the country get their monthly payments through permanent payment stations and mobile distributors. If the families, for one reason or another, fail to personally receive their grants, the Ministry, in collaboration with Administration zones, does the necessary paper work to ease the problem. In establishing permanent payment stations factors such as number of grant receiving families, power supply, and availability of bank and transportation service are taken into consideration. There are 15 permanent payment stations located in different parts of the six regions of the country. The permanent payment stations provide payment services every month. There are also 37 mobile payment stations that are deployed by the permanent stations to pay in 37 sub zonal administrations. Mobile payment stations pay four times a year. The inhabitants of the 37 sub zones have the choice of receiving their monthly payment at a permanent payment station rather than waiting for three months for the mobile payment station. Payment procedures are also conducted through agents of recipients when the receiving parties cannot afford to receive the grant in person.

Though the Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare is entrusted with the overall responsibility of ensuring the implementation of the policy, it is the National Insurance Corporation of Eritrea (NICE) that disburses the monthly payments through the payment stations. The main task of the Ministry is to send weekly data of families that should receive the grants, and NICE sends information of the paid families to the MLHW.

The Eritrean society in general helps families of fallen heroes. Communities and students help families of fallen heroes in ploughing their farm-lands, by giving out grain and other farm products, while local traders and shopkeepers give support in the form of cash.

Eritreans in Diasporas have also been playing an indispensable role in the implementation of the program. They encourage communities abroad to more than lighting candles and planting trees on June 20. In 2003, the MLHW sent names of around 15,625 martyrs of the revolutionary struggle to Eritreans abroad for sponsorship. The citizens have been raising money and depositing it to the Martyrs' Trust Fund.

Support from these individuals, families and organizations usually take the form of sponsoring members of the families of martyrs. Families, individuals, students, groups and institutions sponsor from one up to tens of families of martyrs. The monthly cash grant, which lasts for two years, is given to families of fallen heroes. When such support is given in lump-sum (two years grants starting from \$30 per month or 500Nakfa) it is quite sufficient to generate substantial income when the beneficiaries invest it in small businesses or other appropriate income generating schemes. Mr. Zerai said that the trust fund is straightaway delivered to the concerned parties after it is received from abroad. He added that although mentioned that the financial support may not always be enough, the spiritual harmony, and sense of belongingness it creates between the giver and the recipient is immense. In addition to the financial support, many Eritreans abroad have established personal contact with the families of martyrs they meet when they come to Eritrea. Besides, they have extended their additional moral and financial support to encourage martyrs in their endeavour to be self-sustained. Such personal meetings between beneficiaries and benefactors have resulted in an extension of the support to life-long, an increased sponsorship to more than one family and for others to render support to children of martyrs in kind such as school materials, clothes, and expenses to cover special events.

Mr. Zerai said that if the martyr is survived by a wife and children, then 50% of the financial aid goes to the wife while the rest 50% is equally divided among the children. In cases where the martyr is survived only by a spouse and parents, 50% of the aid goes to the spouse and 25% to each of the surviving parents. However, if only the children of the martyrs are the survivors, 100% of the fund is channelled towards the children. Mr. Zerai said that the number of grant-recipient families always fluctuates; therefore, people should inform sub-zonal branch offices of MLHW about their current status.

Overall, citizens are fulfilling their duties to 15,494 families of fallen heroes. The 14,923 families have so far received direct cash grants of 117,293, 232 Nakfa. However, the MLHW is working to replace cash payments by small business such as snack bars and dairy farms. There are 571 women rehabilitated in such a way instead of receiving direct cash payments. The monthly cash grants are still paid to those who are allowed to lead their lives by conducting many forms of business.

Training sessions are also given to the spouses of fallen heroes who have

low standard of living. It is organized to rehabilitate these women and enable them stand on their own earnings. Many women mastered weaving (85%), produced ceramics (5%), enhanced their knowledge in computer literacy (8.5%) and auto mechanics (1.5%). Trainees receive a monthly allowance of 700 Nakfa to cover their miscellaneous expenses. After completing one training program trainees are provided with a full package of machine, particularly those women in weaving.

The families of the martyrs deserve the honour of receiving financial, material and moral support from everyone. This, of course, is part and parcel of the long-lived tradition of the Eritrean people to help the needy and disadvantaged members of their communities.

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