

# The nationalization of St. Joseph's School Keren – Eritrea September 2019

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## 1. Background

### 1.1. Eritrea

Eritrea is a new nation in the Horn of Africa with a population of approximately 6 million. The modern history of Eritrea dates back to the period of colonization, by Italy during more than 50 years (1890-1941) and later for about ten years under the administration of the Great Britain. Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia in 1952 by United Nations' resolution.

During the period 1952-1962, the Ethiopian regime ultimately annexed Eritrea as one of the provinces of Ethiopia and in 1961 an armed struggle for liberation that lasted for thirty years began. On 24 May 1991 the thirty-year war concluded and in May 1993, Eritrea declared its independence following an internationally supervised referendum.

### 1.2. Education in Eritrea

Before the Italian occupation, the only form of education offered was religious education. Christians and Muslims were offering listening, reading and writing skills to their respective faithful for the purpose of preparing priests and sheiks.

Formal education was first introduced during the Italian colonial period in 1890.



In 1941, the Italian colonization were replaced by British military occupation and the educational system were more or less the same except introducing local language as a means of instruction and allowing Eritrean students to proceed to advanced level of Education.

## 2. St. Joseph's School – Keren

### 2.1. Background

On October 19, 1949, while Eritrea was still under the British Administration and before federated with Ethiopia, the ground breaking for the construction of St. Joseph's school took place. A member of De La Salle Brothers from the Province of Rome, Brother Adriano Clemente, was the dreamer and founder of St. Joseph's school Keren.

A year later, in April 1950, the first class for boys began with 150 students. The instruction was the responsibility of two Brothers and two lay teachers. In the Academic year 1960/61 the level of classes was increased to Grade 5 & 6 and advanced up to Grade 8 in 1962/63. After independence, and in the academic year 1993/94, St. Joseph commenced the high school level.

At the moment, St. Joseph accommodates one thousand eight hundred students and known for its academic excellence. This school produced many leaders and successful individuals. Many priests and a bishop are alumni of this school. Different congregations and two eparchies of Eritrea (out of four eparchies), send their minor seminarians to this school.

### 2.2 Nationalization

On September 2, 2019, the government officials informed the Catholic secretariat that they would come the next day to take over the school. The next day on September 3, 2019, around ten government officials from the ministry of Education, Police, National Security and Regional administration office came to the school and simply informed the Brothers that the school is taken over. Consequently,





they have taken keys of the school and appointed a new school director.

### 3. The impact of Nationalization in the life of the Brothers

This is the most difficult time for us; we are traumatized and frustrated. We notice feeling of helplessness and hopelessness among the Brothers. The usual passion for service is affected.

We have lived in most difficult times. We lived under pressure, frustration and uncertainties. Elder Brothers had witnessed the nationalization of our school in Asmara in 1982. And again they are experiencing the same pain.

Almost all the Brothers passed through St. Joseph's school Keren. St. Joseph inspired many to find their vocation as Brothers. Mission is what brings the young to our congregation and St. Joseph was at the heart of it.

### 4. Witness of those who passed through St. Joseph's School

Below is the expression of witnesses of Brothers and lay partners. Few samples are taken from the post on social Medea

“Our wounds are deep, our hearts broken, our tears ocean and our spirit sad by the loss of our common home, where we learned love, brotherhood, and many other values! But, we know St. Joseph's is alive and will be forever in the hearts of thousands of its heroes and heroines. No one has the key to take away what St. Joseph has instilled in our hearts! Moreover, we all stand together to rebuild it when God allows it. courage all the family of this prestigious and iconic school.” *Br. Awate Fisseha: Former student of St. Joseph, FSC Brother and Director of St. Joseph's school since 2005.*

“Today is a sad day for many of us who have gone through St. Joseph school. From today on St. Joseph is no more as you knew it. It has been nationalized this morning by the government. I don't know how to express my emotion right now, but the memory of my beloved St. Joseph will always remain in my heart. They can take the building but they cannot take what is in me.



The moral value, brotherhood and sisterhood that I learned in St. Joseph will always remain in me. And I hope and pray that one day St. Joseph will be returned to its right owners.” *Br. Ghebrehiwet Iyasu: Former student of St. Joseph, FSC Brother and now studying at Nairobi.*

“In a very short-sighted order, and with very little effort, what we all collectively built in the last 70 years ended up in our eyes in such a brutal fashion. However, we will never lose hope because God is for us, and who can ever be against us? We will triumph against the evil” *Br. Weldetsion Ukbatisae: Former student of St. Joseph and FSC Brother studying in Nairobi.*

“I am truly sad to be informed about forcible nationalization of St. Joseph school. This is a devastating news for alumni, current students, and for those who were looking forward to studying there. I give thanks to all the teachers and Lasallian Brothers who have been working tirelessly to equip their students with academic, moral values and all the knowledge tools that they need in life.” *Mubarak Salim: A Muslim and former student living in Canada.*

“It is a heart breaking news. Your only crime was giving out the best you had, so that you bring up an ambitious, successful, self-giving and most importantly well-mannered citizens. A dictator regime knows how to make your heart bleed but what they don’t know about is that you heal back and stand up strong when you see your children whom you installed your values in, grew up to be the best no matter where they are and stand against any injustice.

Lasallian Brothers, though your scar is so deep, I know you are proud because you taught your children best values of life and rendered sacred services to the community. Your teachings and your values is in every ones’ heart, and I am sure this will destroy the dictator. St Joseph school will always remain the best place and the second home for everyone who knows it.” *Hania Abubeker: A Muslim and former teacher at St. Joseph living in Cairo.*





“Thank you all Lasallian Brothers for guiding my life through the right way. I am always happy not only for being alive but also for living a meaningful life and that is because of my dear Lasallians. You are not only the teachers of academy but the teachers of the greatest grace of the world which is love, unity, morality, spirituality and values of life. I would not be who I am without you Lasallians! If the real meaning of life is to be a gift for others, that is what a Lasallian life means. You are always in my heart St. Joseph school and Lasallian Brothers.”

*Sabel Tesfay, Former student from Asmara*

“Today is the second saddest day of my life. When I lost my mother, I felt as if half of my life disappeared. The remaining half is paralyzed today by the regime in Eritrea when it nationalized my school; St. Joseph’s school Keren. Let the world hear our cry and may the Lord wipe our tears... We will wake up and rebuild what they are destroying.” *Dr. Amanuel Abraha: Former student and former Brother from USA.*

Brothers, you have been serving everyone irrespective of their background and denomination. As a result, you are shining all over the world. I am not a catholic but I am proud super Lasallian! *Mehari Zeray: Former teacher of St. Joseph and refugee in Ethiopia.*

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***The dream of St. Joseph’s School:  
Expansion plan/design***



**Br. Negasi Gebreab, FSC**

**Asmara**