



THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF
JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

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From The European Association
of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses

Contribution to the Report of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights
on the implementation of the new review mechanism of the Human Rights Council,
established by GA Resolution 60/251
and by the Human Rights Council in Resolution 5/1 of 18 June 2007
for the 18th session of the UPR
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ERITREA

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SUMMARY OF THE SUBMISSION

Jehovah's Witnesses experience their most intense persecution in Eritrea, more than anywhere else in the world. The Eritrean government has consistently imprisoned, tortured, harassed, and intimidated Jehovah's Witnesses since it became an independent country in 1993. Jehovah's Witnesses enjoy no basic or fundamental freedoms and the worsening human rights violations are threatening the continued existence of men, women, and children.

The situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea has digressed since the previous submission to the UPR in 2009. Two elderly Witnesses have died because of the severe conditions in the Meitir prison camp. Most of those arrested during the 2008 campaign by the Eritrea authorities are still imprisoned. Three Witnesses have been in prison since September 24, 1994.

Introduction

1. Jehovah's Witnesses have been in Eritrea for decades. Persecution began in 1993 and escalated after a Presidential Decree dated October 25, 1994, in which President Afewerki declared that Jehovah's Witnesses who are Eritrean by birth have revoked their citizenship "by their refusal to take part in the referendum, and have reconfirmed their position by refusing to take part in the National Service, thus deciding to revoke their citizenship." Consequently, all Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea were stripped of their basic civil rights. To the present, they are not allowed to work in any government offices, their business licenses are revoked, and their identity cards and travel documents are confiscated.

Imprisonment and abuse of Jehovah's Witnesses

1. **General Situation.** There are 56 of Jehovah's Witnesses imprisoned in Eritrea. Forty-seven are in the Sawa and Meitir prison camps and nine are in other locations. Of these, 15 are known to be imprisoned for their conscientious objection to military service. Others were arrested while attending Christian meetings, while publicly sharing their faith, or for reasons unknown. None of those imprisoned have been formally charged or given a trial and sentenced. Most do not know how long they will remain in prison. Twenty-three are 60 years of age or older, two of whom are 85 years old. Prisoners are denied visitors, including family members.
2. **Death of Yohannes Haile.** On August 16, 2012, Yohannes Haile, a 68-year-old Witness and father of nine, died while imprisoned at the Meitir prison camp. According to reports, he succumbed to the excessive heat and a lack of hydration while being held in a metal building half-buried in the ground. He was apparently transferred to a hospital in Meitir for treatment the week prior to his death. His imprisonment started on September 18, 2008, when he was arrested without charges.
3. **Death of Misghina Gebretinsae.** In July 2011, Misghina Gebretinsae, a 62-year-old Witness and father of four, died while imprisoned at the Meitir prison camp. Misghina Gebretinsae died under mysterious circumstances, enduring excessive heat and lack of

hydration while being held in a metal building half-buried in the ground. His imprisonment started on July 10, 2008, when he was arrested without charges.

4. **Prison Conditions at the Meitir Camp.** On October 5, 2011, all 25 male Witnesses who were imprisoned at the Meitir camp (including Yohannes Haile) were transferred from the regular prison facility to an area for special punishment and were placed in a half-buried metal building. The heat during the summer months is so intense that no one can stay inside the building during the day. According to eye-witness accounts, prisoners are put outside during the day under an open-air structure with a thatched roof, and then are returned to the metal building at night. The lack of a balanced diet and sufficient water creates a constant struggle to maintain a measure of health.
5. Since the death of Yohannes Haile in August 2012, the Meitir prison authorities have moved the other Witness prisoners from the metal building to an outside pen in the same special punishment area. Three elderly Witnesses of the group are also in a critical state of health due to the extreme heat they endured over the summer months.
6. **New Arrests.** On April 21, 2012, a number of Jehovah's Witnesses attended a funeral of a fellow believer in the city of Keren. An undercover security agent who was present at the funeral arrested a number of the Witnesses when the service was over. Though some were later released, 10 of these Witnesses are still in detention—4 in Keren and 6 who have been transferred to the Meitir Camp. As noted on the attached prisoners list, the 4 prisoners remaining in Keren are over 70 years old—two of whom are 85 years old.
7. **Imprisonment and Release of Children.** On June 28, 2009, Eritrean police arrested and imprisoned 23 of Jehovah's Witnesses who were meeting peacefully for worship in a private home in Asmara. Those arrested included the elderly, women, and children as young as two years old. Although the elderly women and some of the children were released soon after their arrest, two of the children (aged two and three years old) and their mothers were held at the 4th Police Station in Asmara until their release on January 4, 2012.

Imprisonment of conscientious objectors to military service

8. On September 24, 1994, conscription started and Jehovah's Witnesses began facing difficulties because of their Bible-based refusal to perform military activities and their general beliefs. Falsely accused of refusing "to recognize the state and its laws" they were stripped of their basic civil rights. Witnesses were subsequently dismissed from employment, were denied use of schools, and were refused identity papers and passports.
9. The national military service requirement has no regulations or provisions for conscientious objection. To avoid being arrested by the ever-present military police that patrol the streets, most male Jehovah's Witnesses between the ages of 18 and 40 are in hiding. Those found are arrested and taken to a military camp, where, once they express their conscientious objection to military service, they are detained and usually

tortured. Some of those of military age have managed to flee the country to avoid persecution; some have been caught while fleeing.

10. **Long-term Imprisonment.** Three of Jehovah's Witnesses, Paulos Eyassu, Isaac Mogos, and Negede Teklemariam, have been imprisoned in the Sawa prison since September 24, 1994, because of their conscientious objection to military service. No charges have been filed against them and they have never been tried in court.

Denial of education

11. Jehovah's Witnesses cannot receive a full secular education. When students register for high school in 9th grade, they are also required to register for national military service. Upon completing the 11th grade, high school students are obliged to go to the Sawa military camp to complete their 12th grade education while receiving military training. Therefore, many of Jehovah's Witnesses do not register for a high school education so as not to compromise their religiously motivated stand to refrain from participation in military training or service.

International Efforts to Assist Eritrean Witnesses

12. For years, Jehovah's Witnesses have attempted to help their Eritrean fellow worshippers through diplomatic channels. They have traveled to the Horn of Africa and met with officials of the African Union, the Intergovernmental Agency for Development, the Delegation of the European Union to the African Union, numerous embassies, and the Foreign Office of Kenya and Uganda. They have also met with the International Red Cross, the United Nations, officials of the Council of Europe and the European Union, the U.S. Department of State, and some Eritrean embassy officials who are willing to meet. Biannually, the Office of General Counsel of Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States provides a human rights report on Eritrea to various governmental agencies and NGOs that are concerned with human rights violations.

Jehovah's Witnesses have often appealed to Eritrean officials to meet with them in an effort to resolve the problems they are enduring. However, the central government in Asmara consistently rebuffs these efforts.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea, and as a worldwide organization, respectfully request the government of Eritrea to:

- (1) Release all prisoners (see list on next page);
- (2) Allow Jehovah's Witnesses to be legally registered;
- (3) Allow freedom to meet and to use homes for worship;
- (4) Allow access to religious literature;
- (5) Recognize the right of conscientious objection to military service;
- (6) Institute an alternative civilian service law;

- (7) Enable Jehovah's Witnesses to obtain identity cards and travel documents;
- (8) Provide basic secondary education for Witness children; and
- (9) Grant Jehovah's Witnesses their fundamental freedoms including the right to obtain employment in the private and government sector to support their families.

FIFTY-SIX IMPRISONED JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES
As of June 2013
(Listed by Date of Imprisonment)

Name of Prisoner	Age	Gender	Prison	Date Imprisoned	Reason for Arrest
1. Paulos Eyassu	39	male	Sawa Camp	September 24, 1994	Conscientious objection
2. Isaac Mogos	36	male	Sawa Camp	September 24, 1994	Conscientious objection
3. Negede Teklemariam	38	male	Sawa Camp	September 24, 1994	Conscientious objection
4. Aron Abraha	38	male	Sawa Camp	May 9, 2001	Conscientious objection
5. Mussie Fessehaye	40	male	Sawa Camp	June 2003	Conscientious objection
6. Ambakom Tsegezab	36	male	Sawa Camp	February 2004	Conscientious objection
7. Bemnet Fessehaye	41	male	Sawa Camp	February 2005	Conscientious objection
8. Henok Ghebru	28	male	Sawa Camp	February 2005	Conscientious objection
9. Worede Kiros	55	male	Sawa Camp	May 4, 2005	Religious activity
10. Yonathan Yonas	26	male	Sawa Camp	November 12, 2005	Religious activity
11. Kibreab Fessehaye	34	male	Sawa Camp	December 27, 2005	Conscientious objection
12. Bereket Abraha Oqbagabir	44	male	Sawa Camp	January 1, 2006	Conscientious objection
13. Yosief Fessehaye	23	male	Sawa Camp	2007	Conscientious objection
14. Mogos Gebremeskel	66	male	Adi-Abieto	July 3, 2008	Unknown
15. Bereket Abraha	65	male	Meitir Camp	July 8, 2008	Unknown
16. Goitom Gebrekristos	76	male	Meitir Camp	July 11, 2008	Unknown
17. Ermias Ashgedom	22	male	Meitir Camp	July 11, 2008	Unknown
18. Habtemichael Mekonen	71	male	Meitir Camp	July 17, 2008	Unknown
19. Tareke Tesfamariam	61	male	Meitir Camp	August 4, 2008	Unknown
20. Tesfai Teklemariam	59	male	Meitir Camp	August 5, 2008	Unknown
21. Goitom Aradom	68	male	Meitir Camp	August 8, 2008	Unknown
22. Habtemichael Tefamariam	64	male	Meitir Camp	August 8, 2008	Unknown
23. Tewoldemedhin Habtezion	53	male	Meitir Camp	August 9, 2008	Unknown
24. Ghebrehiwet Ghebremichael	68	male	Meitir Camp	August 22, 2008	Unknown
25. Teferi Beyene	71	male	Meitir Camp	September 23, 2008	Unknown
26. Beyene Abraham	60	male	Meitir Camp	October 23, 2008	Unknown
27. Asfaha Haile	78	male	Meitir Camp	December 2, 2008	Unknown
28. Semere Negusse	75	male	Meitir Camp	December 22, 2008	Unknown

Name of Prisoner	Age	Gender	Prison	Date Imprisoned	Reason for Arrest
29. Muse Paulos	67	male	Meitir Camp	December 23, 2008	Unknown
30. Tsehaye Leghesse	73	male	Meitir Camp	December 23, 2008	Unknown
31. Tsegezeab Tesfazghi	63	male	Meitir Camp	December 23, 2008	Unknown
32. Tsehaye Tesfamariam	71	male	Meitir Camp	January 5, 2009	Unknown
33. Yoab Tecele	61	male	Meitir Camp	April 23, 2009	Rearrested
34. Yoel Tsegezab	36	male	Meitir Camp	August 26, 2008	Conscientious objection
35. Nehemiah Hagos	26	male	Meitir Camp	August 26, 2008	Conscientious objection
36. Samuel Ghirmay	30	male	Meitir Camp	March 2009	Conscientious objection
37. Teklu Gebrehiwot	37	male	Meitir Camp	June 28, 2009	Religious Meeting
38. Isaias Afeworki	27	male	Meitir Camp	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting
39. Milen Isaac	22	female	Meitir Camp	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting
40. Faiza Seid	27	female	Meitir Camp	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting
41. Merhawit Tadesse	22	female	Meitir Camp	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting
42. Yodit Mekonnen	30	female	Meitir Camp	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting
43. Misghana GoitomAradom	20	female	Meitir Camp	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting
44. Filemon Yemane	22	male	Adi-Abieto	November 23, 2010	Religious activity
45. Yonadab Yonas	22	male	Adi-Abieto	November 23, 2010	Religious activity
46. Tesfazion Gebremichael	70	male	Asmara 5 th Police Station	July 20, 2011	Unknown
47. Ghebrehiwot Tedla	85	male	Keren Police Station	April 21, 2012	Preaching at a funeral
48. Yemane Kifleyohannes	77	male	Keren Police Station	April 21, 2012	Preaching at a funeral
49. Zerisenai Ghebrehiwot	71	male	Keren Police Station	April 21, 2012	Preaching at a funeral
50. Hagos Woldemichael	60	male	Meitir Camp	April 21, 2012	Preaching at a funeral
51. Araia Ghebremariam	58	male	Meitir Camp	April 21, 2012	Preaching at a funeral
52. Tsegabirhan Berhe	49	male	Meitir Camp	April 21, 2012	Preaching at a funeral
53. Daniel Meharizghi	35	male	Meitir Camp	April 21, 2012	Preaching at a funeral
54. Redae Hagos	85	male	Keren Police Station	April 26, 2012	Preaching at a funeral
55. Amharai Osman	-	male	Meitir Camp	April 25, 2012	Preaching at a funeral
56. Yoseph Tesfamariam	48	male	Asmara	May 2012	Conscientious objection