

UPR Submission
ERITREA
June 2013

1. This submission has been prepared by Eritreans for Human and Democratic Rights – UK (EHDR-UK) and Release Eritrea (RE), which are Eritrean human rights organisations based in the United Kingdom. This is a second report for consideration during Eritrea's second UPR.
2. Sadly, the human rights situation in Eritrea did not show any improvement since the last review. Many more are languishing in various detention centres most of which remain not fit for human habitation. Families of the detained still do not know what happened to their loved ones and incommunicado detention remains the norm. People continue to be detained for unknown reasons, at undisclosed detention places for unspecified periods of time. National service is still for an indefinite period of time and another form of conscription, that of the elderly up to the age of 70, was introduced since the last UPR. The number of those fleeing the country continues unabated. There remains no freedom of worship, association, expression or movement.

Arbitrary Detention and Detention Conditions

3. Unlawful detention of people for unknown reasons continues to be the norm. Following an army mutiny (or coup attempt) in January 2013, a number of people were detained some of whom were high ranking officials of the regime. Mustafa Nurhussain and Abdela Jaber were two of most senior. Mustafa Nurhussain was the administrator of the Southern region and Abdela Jaber was the head of Organisational Affairs of the ruling party (People's Front for Democracy and Justice, PFDJ). An unknown number of other people were also detained. The Eritrean authorities have not charged them with any recognisable offence to date, but the regime's rumour mill links them with those behind the mutiny. There were also unconfirmed rumours that Mustafa Nurhussain may have died in detention because of his underlying diabetes.
4. The 'Special Court', which was set up by the President to allegedly fight corruption, remains in place. Ermias Debesay, a former ambassador to China, who was re-arrested in November 2003 remains in detention to this day. Bitwedded Abraha, a veteran of the independence struggle who was detained in 1997 also remains in detention.
5. A number of political opposition figures also remain detained in undisclosed places all over the country. Some were kidnapped from neighbouring countries and their number or whereabouts remains unknown. In recent months, the Sudanese authorities detained Eritrean opposition figures Abdulqadir Mohammed Afa, Adu Mohammed Noor, Mohammed Saed Hakim, Ibrahim Haj Mohammed,

- Omer Humed Osman, Ahmed Salah Abbeker, Idris Mohammed Idris and Mohammed Ahmed Idris. There are fears that they may have been sent to Eritrea.
6. Most prisoners, especially political prisoners, are still not allowed visits by family members or legal representatives. No one has been charged with any offence. Most remain detained in undisclosed locations some of which are located in inhospitable climates.
 7. The eleven high ranking government and party officials (the G11, part of the so called G-15) and the fifteen journalists who worked for the independent or state media remain detained and despite numerous appeals from international bodies including the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, the government has failed to make any meaningful statement regarding their detention, health and wellbeing. They remain in undisclosed detention to date. There are reports that some may have died while in detention but the government still has not given any official response.
 8. The HRC's Special Rapporteur on Eritrea has summarised the situation well.

Mass killings

9. Following the death of more than 40 young people in November 2004 in Adi Abieto and the reported death of 161 in Wi'a, the government has neither acknowledged the incident nor informed the families of the deceased.
10. The 'shoot to kill' policy of the Eritrean government against those trying to flee the country continues to be applied and the number of reported deaths at the borders of Eritrea continues to increase.

Media Freedom

11. The government of Eritrea continues to operate extreme censorship. There have not been any independent media outlets since Sept 2001, no foreign journalists have been accredited since 2007 and the state media outlet continues to produce only material that reflects the government's official stand. Crucial information, of interest to the Eritrean public is never transmitted. This includes, various accidents and atrocities facing Eritrean migrants, international news including events such as the Arab spring the deposition of various African leaders and even the death of African leaders that have significance to Eritrean affairs e.g. the death of Muammar Gaddafi and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi.
12. The journalists that were jailed during the government crackdown in Sept 2001 continue to be unaccounted for; several have been reported dead and the rest are said to be in poor health conditions. Even State Media professionals are said to be operating under severe pressure/ control and many abandon their jobs and flee the

country. At the end of December 2012, even the then Information Minister Mr Ali Abdu fled the country and is said to have sought asylum.

Religious Persecution

13. The Government continues to deny registration of the religious groups that were disallowed in May 2001, hence only four groups namely: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Sunni Islam, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea are officially recognised. Thousands of people continue to be imprisoned, harassed and denied many services on the count of their faith. The number of new detentions appeared to be going down in 2012, however since January 2013, the government seems to have started a renewed campaign of arrests and close to 200 people have been detained from various prayer meetings and as a result of intelligence gathering carried out by government agents. The detained include an elderly woman of 85 and a group of college students, in their twenties, gathered for a private prayer meeting
14. Following the army mutiny/an attempted coup in January 2013, the government seems to also be targeting Moslems as suspected instigators of the failed coup attempt.

Militarisation and Forced Labour

15. The perpetual 'military service' of all young men and women aged between 18 and 50 has been extended to those between 50 and 70. Elderly men and women were made to train and carry Kalashnikov rifles with a view to be militias protecting the cities.
16. Eritrean society continues to be one of the most militarised societies in the world. High school students are still forcibly enrolled for education in military camps, where they are disciplined under strict martial rule. The youth in the national service continue to be forced to do unpaid, labour intensive work under harsh conditions, usually enduring abuse and maltreatment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

17. We would like to endorse and support all of the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea; Sheila B. Keetharuth.