

United Nations Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review of Member-State of Eritrea

Jubilee Campaign which is in special consultative status with ECOSOC, submits this analysis of religious freedom and human rights in Eritrea as a contribution to the Universal Period Review of UNHRC member-state Eritrea.

Freedom of Expression

1. Perhaps the most oppressive and secretive governmental regime in the world, Eritrea's human rights record is severe and worsening. President Isayas Afewerki has replaced an independent nation whose citizens desired a democratic political voice with extreme totalitarianism. The number of refugees fleeing oppression continues to climb as the government attempts to assert authority over political, social, economic, and religious realms of society. The press is owned and run by the government. National elections have not been held by Afewerki's regime. Few freedoms exist for Eritreans.
2. Eritrea is essentially a closed country. Very few officials of Human Rights groups are allowed in, and no human rights organizations independently operate within the country. If a representative is allowed in, the representative is typically restricted to the capitol. The president of Eritrea keeps an iron grip of control which prevents dissent of any kind, and the result is the totalitarian state that it is today.
3. The constitution, approved in 1997, has yet to be implemented and enforced in Eritrea. Without constitutional recognition of rights, citizens have no protection of their rights, including freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of press and raising criticism or even critique of the government, or freedom of religion. While Eritrea's laws and constitution allow the freedom of speech and press, these provisions are not put into practice. Instead, those who publicly opposed the government were arrested or detained and private press was banned. No religious organization may publish anything without the review of the government.
4. Those who are detained including for reason of their religious belief and practice face brutal treatment. A proper trial often does not occur. Solitary confinement or being forcibly jailed into a metal container is common. Detainees are not allowed to pray, sing, or preach, and all religious books are prohibited. Further, it is reported that Eritrean soldiers, for which enlistment is required, are frequently banned from engaging in religious activities. Soldiers are subject to penalty of imprisonment and face severe punishment for possessing religious literature, including Bibles and Qur'ans.

Religious Freedom

5. The government officially recognizes only four religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Islam, and the Roman Catholic Church. No other groups may hold services, prayer meetings, or conduct religious activities. Of the four recognized religious groups the government appointed the heads of each. The Patriarch Abune Antonious of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, who was replaced outside of the church hierarchy by an appointee of the Eritrean president, has been subject to

house arrest for over seven years.

6. If a religious organization wants to register, it must apply through the government and give detailed information about its finances, membership, and activities. The government then chooses which applications would be best for society, but historically any legal status has been limited to the four religious groups already established and applications merely expose the applicants to scrutiny and possible persecution. Since 2002 the government has not registered any groups despite the Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church, Seventh-day Adventists, and Baha'i community all submitting the required applications. Once a group is registered it must submit activity reports to the government every six months, and in December 2010 the Eritrea Department of Religious Affairs reportedly told these groups to stop accepting funds from co-religionists abroad.
7. The four recognized religious organizations are afforded some legal benefits, although they are not consistently shielded from government persecution. Groups seeking to worship without registration are targeted for persecution. Jubilee Campaign is aware due to our organization's participation with other NGOs that in March of 2013, 125 Christians worshipping outside a state approved church were beaten and detained.
8. In the past five years 1,700 clergymen have been forced out of the church, 23 known clergymen remain imprisoned (some since November 2004), 14 priests have been banned from setting foot inside the compound of any church, and 7 priests have been restricted so they can only work in Asmara. Those who fled because of persecution include 49 workers from the offices of the Patriarchate, 32 monks, and 5 nuns. In total approximately 3,050 clergymen have been forced out of work. Jubilee Campaign is aware of this specific information first being reported on February 28, 2011.
9. Jubilee Campaign has observed that on the individual level citizens were tolerant of other groups except regarding Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostal groups. Additionally Evangelicals and Pentecostals are often denied employment and housing opportunities.
10. According to a Christian leader in Eritrea, religious persecution is at its highest and is getting worse. Jubilee Campaign has received reports that as many as 3,000 Christians are currently being detained because of their faith. By the issuance of this report in 2013, at least 191 Christians have been arrested because of contravening government decrees concerning religious faith and practice. They are often kept in poor living conditions such as metal shipping containers without ventilation or toilet facilities.
11. Jubilee Campaign understands from our sources including interviews of religious prisoners who managed to escape that those imprisoned for religious reasons have reported being beaten and coerced to denounce their faith as a pre-condition to release. Often they are not formally charged, are not permitted access to legal counsel, are not accorded due process, or allowed access to their families. It is now common to hear of deaths of religious prisoners who refused to recant their beliefs. These prisoners were denied medical treatment or were subjected to other ill treatment.

12. Jubilee Campaign is aware of a report of one man who was released from prison after being imprisoned for no apparent reason other than his Christian identity reported that he was kept in a 10' by 14' prison house with 14 other men. After one of the men tried to escape they were all stripped and tortured. Afterwards the man was put in a 6' by 6' solitary confinement cell with no windows or other way to see outside. It was completely blacked out. Additionally he was given meager meals and only allowed to use the toilet twice a day.

Refugees

13. Despite risking death and the "shoot-to-kill" orders for those who cross the border without permission, Eritreans flee the country by the thousands. Two new camps were opened by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees because of the overcrowding of a refugee camp in northern Ethiopia in 2008. Jubilee Campaign is aware of several NGOs assisting Eritrean people who have fled the country desperate for food and shelter as well as those subjected to cruel and horrendous forms of trafficking within neighboring countries to Eritrea.
14. Eritrean asylum-seekers flee to neighboring Djibouti, Ethiopia, Sudan as well as to Egypt. The UNHCR estimates that some 250,000 Eritrean's have fled as refugees. They are fleeing from mandatory military service and from religious persecution. Pentecostal Christians make up the largest percentage of refugees. Often refugees become victims of human trafficking, are tortured and given ill treatment as they move from refugee camps in Ethiopia or Sudan to Europe.
15. Jubilee Campaign is aware of an example first report in May 23, 2013 which detailed the account of an individual who while making the dangerous trip across the deserts of Sinai to get to Israel fell into the hands of people traffickers. He was transferred to a third trafficker after his family had paid \$5,000 to the two previous groups for his release. The third group tortured him leaving him with permanent scars on his body, and he was not released until his family paid another \$30,000 in ransom money. Jubilee Campaign is aware of many such examples of cruel and deplorable human trafficking of Eritrean refugees.
16. The plight of other refugees on their journey to safety often includes forced labor, electric shocks, branding, and continual torture if their ransoms are not paid including by removing saleable organs. However the Eritrean government denies any abuses of human rights occurring in their country or to its citizens. European Parliament Resolution on Eritrean Refugees Held Hostage in Sinai, Nov. 17, 2010.
17. The Eritrean government provided limited cooperation to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to provide protection and assistance. It defines refugee differently from the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees; the government does not recognize refugee status for Ethiopians. The government provides protection to Somali and Sudanese refugees on a *prima facie* basis.

Recommendations

18. Jubilee Campaign recommends that the constitution of Eritrea be ratified and implemented immediately. Eritrean citizens need to have a system of protection over their rights, and the current government has no respect for this. The international community must speak in a unified voice to demand implementation of the 1997 Constitution.
19. Neighboring countries who are looking to establish peace should promote democratic elections to select new leaders who will not cause a societal regression in the form of totalitarianism.
20. Jubilee Campaign also recommends that provisions to protect refugees be implemented into the constitution before it is ratified. Military service should not be forced on anyone, especially those who are pacifist and are being persecuted for it. A long-term peace agreement should be worked out with neighboring countries in order to ensure regional stability.
21. The lack of religious freedom in Eritrea is appalling. We urge international pressure to force this government into more tolerance for all faiths. Eritrea must release all religious prisoners who were arrested for refusing to renounce their beliefs. Constitutional articles protecting the individual's right to the freedom of speech, belief, practice, and association should be a primary point of focus for Eritrea.
22. Current laws requiring religious organization to register should be invalidated as the government clearly uses the laws as a tool to control and such restricts freedom of religion. Any new laws must comply with international standards, including those set forth by the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Belief and Practice.
23. Finally, the Eritrean government should allow United Nations appointed human rights officials into the country with free reign to conduct engage on improving the state of human rights in the country. Eritrea must be required to give its full cooperation to U.N. mechanisms calling for rights protections to all citizens.