

VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF IN ERITREA

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Reecommendations from the second UPR

During the second UPR cycle Eritrea accepted recommendations from:

- ✓ Canada
- ✓ Romania
- ✓ Japan

Regarding:

1. The need to guarantee freedom of religion or belief
2. Ensuring the rights of religious minorities
3. Protect religious communities from persecution.

Assessment:

- Eritrea has a long standing open policy of “not allowing” religious groups that the government deems as “fundamentalist”. These includes groups like the Baptists, Methodists, Seventh Day Adventists etc. In fact only groups belonging to Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox and Islam are allowed. The groups that are sanctioned also face pressure and hostility
- During the reporting period open persecution of unsanctioned groups and extreme hostility to all religions was prevalent
- This presentation is drawn out from a wider submission from our consortium of three organisations that will be listed at the end of the presentation.

Updates on 'unsanctioned' Christian groups

- Currently it is believed that there are at least 400 Christians from non-sanctioned churches in detention.
- Of these long-term prisoners having been in detention since 2004.
- The latest arrests took place in the summer of 2018 where a group of Christians were arrested for welcoming an Ethiopian evangelist who arrived with the first flight following the Ethio-Eritrean peace deal.
- There have also been reports of deaths in prison as a result of torture and denial of medical care.
- Fikadu Debesay, a mother of four, was detained in May 2017 during a house raid in Adi Quala. By August, following severe mistreatment, and delayed medical assistance, she died in Metkel Abiyot, a desert camp in the Northern Red Sea Region.

Updates: Jehovah's Witnesses

- President Issias Afewerki revoked their citizenship by Presidential Decree on October 25, 1994, because the Witnesses did not vote in the 1993 independence referendum and they conscientiously object to military service.
- Since then, Eritrean security forces have imprisoned, tortured, and harassed Jehovah's Witnesses in an effort to force them to recant their faith.
- By the end of 2017, a total of 55 Jehovah's Witnesses were reported to be imprisoned without trial or formal charges. Three of those, have been incarcerated since 1994.
- In March 2018 it was reported that two elderly Jehovah's Witnesses had died in Mai Serwa Prison.

Updates on 'sanctioned' Christian Groups

The Orthodox Church: The government fully controls the Church personnel, administering Church finances and assets. It appoints its highest officials in disregard to Canonical laws.

- Priests oppose are detained and harassed. Many leave the country.
- The Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Abune Antonios, was illegally removed from office in 2006 and remains under house arrest reportedly under pressure to resign in favour of the pro-government bishop.

The Catholic Church: continues to suffer harassment including the closure of seminaries. When the administration of the seminary refused to close the Medhanialew Seminary in Asmara in September 2017, the government forcefully closed it and detained a nun and a priest (they were released a week later).

- Several clinics and health centres run by the church were closed at the end of 2017

Updates on Muslims

- Muslims have been detained and harassed under various pretexts since 1994.
- Similarly to the Orthodox they have been suffering increasing interference and demands to handover administration of education facilities.
- On 20 October 2017, Hajji Musa Mohammed Nur, the President of Al Diaa Islamic School in Asmara, was arrested, along with several others for opposing the government's attempted expropriation of the Al Diaa private Islamic school. This was followed by a rare but peaceful demonstration by the community showing the strength of sentiments against the decision.
- On 3 March 2018, the family of Hajji Musa was told to recover his body from a hospital, he had died the day before in the Police Station, where he had been held since his arrest.
- Following his burial, hundreds were arrested, some as young as 13.

Conclusion

Over the last several years the government of Eritrea has on several occasions stated its preferences of the UPR mechanism for addressing human rights concerns. However the records of implementation of recommendations accepted clearly fall short of the professed commitment.

We urge that the Human Rights Council (HRC) use this current cycle to include a clearer mechanism tasking the government of Eritrea to live up to its often professed commitments to the UPR process

Recommendations

- ✓ Implementation of the ratified constitution
- ✓ Ensure the full enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief for all citizens in accordance with the constitution and international statutes to which the nation is party, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- ✓ Implement the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT). Eritrea has already acceded to the ICCPR and ACHPR, both of which prohibit the use of torture

Thank you

- ❑ Release Eritrea
- ❑ Centre for Global Nonkilling
- ❑ Conscience and Peace Tax International

Tributes to

Habtemichael Tesfamariam (76) who died suddenly on 3 January 2018

Habtemichael Mekonen, aged 77, died on 6 March 2018

Hajji Musa Mohammed Nur died on the 2 march2018

Fikadu Debesay, a mother of four, dies August 2017

