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In 2015, the human rights situation in Eritrea remained of serious concern, although there were some limited signs of progress. FCO's human rights priorities in Eritrea focused on encouraging government action in three areas: to clarify, and, where necessary, amend the terms and conditions of prolonged national service (which is predominantly non- military); to implement the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations that it accepted and look positively at implementing those it did not; and to implement its own constitution.

The government of Eritrea took some incremental steps forward in 2015. It gave assurances to international partners to limit national service to 18 months. We do not yet have evidence that this has been implemented, and continue to press Eritrea to fulfil its commitment. We welcomed, however, the government's announcement in early 2016 that it would increase salaries for all those performing national service. Eritrea also increased its international engagement on human rights by participation in the UPR process and developing a stronger relationship with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The OHCHR was allowed to conduct the first independent visit to a place of detention since the late 2000s. We also welcomed Eritrea joining the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in November 2015. In January 2015, Eritrea released six journalists who had been detained since 2009.

However, concerns remain. There have been no elections in Eritrea since independence in 1993. Eritrea has not yet implemented its 1997 constitution, though the government reports that preparatory work on the drafting of a new constitution is under way. Freedom of association and expression continue to be severely constrained. Opposition political parties and independent press are banned. Eritrea remains at the bottom of the World Press Freedom Index for the 8th consecutive year. Constraints on freedom of religion or belief persist, and the rule of law and the judiciary remain weak and liable to be circumvented through informal and extra-judicial forms of justice. There remain numerous reports of individuals who have been extra-judicially detained for long periods of time for political reasons. We remain concerned about the Eritrean government's approach to LGB&T issues. Homosexual activity in Eritrea is still classed as illegal. Eritrea declines to develop anti-discrimination legislation which would provide protection for the LGB&T community.

Eritrea's national service system remains one of the drivers of migration from the country. Eritrea took part in the Valletta Summit on Migration (11-12 November 2015) and continues to engage

with international partners through the African Union / EU Khartoum Process which looks to tackle forced migration and human trafficking.

We continue to press Eritrea to take further steps on human rights. In 2016, the UK's priorities in Eritrea will continue to be to urge the Eritrean government to work on implementing the constitution and to reform the national service system which acts as a driver of migration. We will continue to support Eritrea's engagement with UN human rights bodies, and encourage them to extend this co-operation to the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Eritrea, as well as the UN Commission of Inquiry into human rights in Eritrea.

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