

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	412
Land:	Eritrea
Kilde:	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Titel:	Assistant Secretary General. Dire Human rights situation in Eritrea
Udgivet:	28. februar 2024
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	17. september 2024

Dire human rights situation in Eritrea

Delivered by

Ilze Brands-Kehris, Assistant Secretary General United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

At

55th session of the Human Rights Council - Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on Human Rights in Eritrea

Location

Geneva

Mr. Vice-President,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues,

I am greatly honoured to address you on the **human rights situation** in Eritrea since the last enhanced interactive dialogue held in March 2023.

The **state of human rights in Eritrea continues to be dire with no signs of improvement**. Our Office continues to receive credible reports of torture; arbitrary detention; inhumane conditions of detention; enforced disappearances; restrictions of the rights to freedoms of expression, of association, and of peaceful assembly. And impunity persists for these egregious human rights violations.

There are also numerous reports of dissenting voices being subjected to systematic repression and silencing, including through the detention or enforced disappearance of thousands of religious leaders and members of religious groups, activists, journalists and those evading mandatory and indefinite military service.

Many dissidents and journalists continue to be held in incommunicado detention. The G-15 members – a group of Eritrean politicians who in 2001 opposed the postponement of elections and the failure to implement the Constitution – remain in detention with their whereabouts unknown, most of them now in the twilight of their lives. This includes the group of 16 journalists who disappeared, including Dawit Isaak, an Eritrean and Swedish dual national. Hanna Petros Solomon – here with us on this podium – is a daughter of Petros Solomon (one of the G-15 members) and Aster Yohaness – who have been both imprisoned incommunicado since 2001 and 2003 respectively.

In the last decade, Eritrea has not ceded its position in the bottom ten of 180 countries for press freedom suppression according to the World Press Freedom Index, and it still

maintains the label of the most censored country in the world according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Eritrea continues to harass and arbitrarily detain people because of their faith, with hundreds of believers affected.

Excellencies,

Eritrea suffers from an **acute lack of rule of law with no independent judiciary or other accountability mechanisms**. It has not enacted any legal or institutional reforms that could foster the promotion and protection of human rights – one of the stumbling blocks for human rights progress in Eritrea. Impunity abounds for violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including those committed in the context of the Tigray conflict by Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF). There is no genuine prospect that the domestic judicial system will hold perpetrators to account.

Our Office also has credible information that the EDF remains in Tigray and continues to commit cross-border violations, namely abductions, rape, looting of property, arbitrary arrest, and other violations of physical integrity. The EDF's continued presence in the Tigray region is contrary to the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement signed in November 2022 that called for the withdrawal of international forces from Ethiopian territory.

Indefinite military service, which remains part of the national military service program, pushes youth to flee Eritrea and undertake perilous journeys in search of security and a future free from torture, labour exploitation, and sexual violence. Deserters of military service are detained and punished.

We reiterate our call that Eritrea should undertake necessary measures to reform its indefinite national service by limiting to the statutory period of 18 months. In addition, it should cease the abhorrent practice of subjecting family members to punishments for the actions of draft deserters.

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

Let me now turn to **Eritrea's engagement and cooperation with our Office – these remain very limited**. Eritrea has not responded to our Office's numerous requests to begin technical cooperation following our Office's last technical visit in May 2022. Since December last year, communication with the Permanent Mission of Eritrea in Geneva, earlier unresponsive to our Office's requests for meetings, has been re-established. Yet, no concrete steps have been taken to progress on technical cooperation. We reiterate that the lack of meaningful cooperation with our Office stands in stark contrast to Eritrea's Human Rights Council membership and its voluntary pledge to continue its engagement with our Office.

As agreed with the authorities during the last technical visit in May 2022, we remain ready to engage on the **five areas identified** jointly, namely on (1) enhancing rights as part of a transformative justice system; (2) the harmonisation of "indigenous or traditional laws" in line with international and regional human rights norms; (3) support to a regional conference on traditional justice; (4) enhancing the rights and protection of persons with

disabilities; and (5) capacity building on the effective engagement with UN human rights mechanisms.

We note that while Eritrea will be reviewed in May under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the **recommendations made during the third cycle in 2019 remain largely unimplemented, including those on peace, justice and on supporting stronger institutions**. According to the Government, a coordination body on reporting had designed a plan and a framework for action to implement the 2019 UPR recommendations. To date, our Office has not seen this plan despite our follow up.

Furthermore, our Office urges Eritrea to **extend full cooperation to international human rights mechanisms**. This includes the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, and the relevant thematic Special Procedures mandate holders, namely those who have requested a visit – including the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Special Rapporteur on torture and the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. We also call on Eritrea to submit overdue reports to United Nations treaty bodies. These include reports to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee Against Torture.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

In closing, let me reiterate our call for the Government to engage in **good faith, and dialogue with our Office**. We remain ready to build on past missions to Eritrea, particularly the one in 2022, to begin to address some of most serious human rights concerns, including through the provision of technical support. I also call on Member States to encourage and facilitate the engagement by Eritrea with the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms.

Thank you.