

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	259
Land:	Eritrea
Kilde:	Freedom House
Titel:	Freedom in the World 2016 - Eritrea
Udgivet:	14. juli 2016
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	5. september 2016

Freedom in the World 2016 - Eritrea

Publisher [Freedom House](#)

Publication Date 14 July 2016

Cite as Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2016 - Eritrea*, 14 July 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/57985a33c.html> [accessed 31 August 2016]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

Freedom Status: Not Free

Aggregate Score: 3

Freedom Rating: 7.0

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 7

Quick Facts

Capital: Asmara

Population: 5,200,000

GDP/capita: \$754.90

Press Freedom Status: Not Free

Net Freedom Status: N/A

OVERVIEW

International pressure increased on Eritrea's authoritarian government with the publication of a damning report by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in June 2015. The report concluded that "systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations" were being committed by the government and suggested that some of the abuses could constitute crimes against humanity.

The number of Eritreans attempting to flee repression has reached unprecedented levels. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that 5,000 people made the journey each month during 2015, placing their lives in the hands of people traffickers. Many headed for Europe. According to the European Union (EU), about 37,000 Eritrean refugees claimed asylum in 2014 and more than 12,000 additional refugees claimed asylum in the first half of 2015.

Under increased scrutiny, the regime of President Isaias Afwerki made tentative moves to end Eritrea's international isolation. Journalists from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) were invited into the country, though their movements were tightly restricted. Talks began with the EU on ways to reduce the flow of migrants out of Eritrea, with an aid package worth 200 million euros (\$227 million) being offered.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Political Rights: 1 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

Following Eritrea's formal independence from Ethiopia in 1993, a Transitional National Assembly chose Afwerki to serve as president until elections could be held. He has remained in charge ever since. His rule has become harshly authoritarian, particularly since the end of a bloody border war with Ethiopia in 2000.

A new constitution, ratified in 1997, called for "conditional" political pluralism and an elected 150-seat National Assembly, which would choose the president from among its members by a majority vote. This system has never been implemented, and national elections planned for 2001 have been postponed indefinitely.

The Transitional National Assembly comprises 75 members of the ruling party – the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) – and 75 elected members. In 2004, regional assembly elections were conducted, but they were carefully orchestrated by the PFDJ and offered no real choice to voters.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16

Created in 1994, the PFDJ is the only legal political party. The PFDJ and the military are in practice the only institutions of political significance in Eritrea, and both entities are strictly subordinate to the president. While certain ethnic minority groups in Eritrea face discrimination and oppression, members of minority groups do hold positions in the PFDJ, the military, and government.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

Corruption is a major problem. The government's control over foreign exchange effectively gives it sole authority over imports, and those in favor with the regime are allowed to profit from the smuggling and sale of scarce goods such as food, building materials, and alcohol. According to the International Crisis Group, senior military officials have profited from smuggling Eritreans out of the country, allegedly colluding with Sudanese paramilitary groups to capture escaped Eritreans and hold them hostage until their families pay ransom.

The government operates without public scrutiny, and few outside a small clique around the president have any insight into how policy and budget decisions are made or implemented.

Civil Liberties: 2 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 0 / 16

The government shut down the independent media in 2001, and controls all broadcasting outlets. However, in 2013 a dissident group began circulating an underground newspaper, *Echoes of Forto*, in Asmara, written by a team based inside and outside the country. The dissidents described the paper as a pilot project, but said they hoped to expand it. The United Nations has described Eritrea as the least connected country in the world. The government controls the internet infrastructure and is thought to monitor online communications, although only about 1 percent of the population can access the medium. Approximately 1 percent of the population has a landline and 7 percent have a mobile-phone subscription. Foreign media are available to those few who can afford a satellite dish. Six journalists from government-controlled Radio Bana station who had been held without charge for almost six years were released in January 2015. However, the

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) estimated that 17 journalists remained in prison in Eritrea as of December 1, 2015, the highest number in sub-Saharan Africa.

The government places strict limits on the exercise of religion. Since 2002 it has officially recognized only four faiths: Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, and Lutheranism as practiced by the Evangelical Church of Eritrea. Members of evangelical and Pentecostal churches face persecution. Jehovah's Witnesses are barred from government jobs and refused business permits and identity cards. A UNHRC estimate from April 2015 said that 58 Jehovah's Witnesses were in prison for their beliefs. According to Amnesty International, members of other churches have been jailed and tortured or otherwise ill-treated to make them abandon their faiths. Abune Antonios, patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, has been under house arrest since speaking out against state interference in religion in 2006. The government has also interfered in the practice of Islam, appointing some muftis directly and imposing doctrine. Practicing religion during national military service is banned, including for religious leaders.

Academic freedom is constrained. Students in their last year of secondary school are subject to obligatory military service at Sawa Military Training Center, where conditions are harsh. Academics practice self-censorship and the government interferes with their course content and limits their ability to conduct research abroad. Eritrea's university system is effectively closed, replaced by regional colleges that primarily function as centers for military training and political indoctrination.

Freedom of expression in private discussions is limited. People are guarded in voicing their opinions for fear of being overheard by government informants. The surveillance network extends overseas, where members of the diaspora have faced intimidation and harassment from regime loyalists.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are not recognized. According to testimony provided to the United Nations, people congregating in groups of more than three or four risk arrest. The government maintains a hostile attitude toward civil society, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are allowed to engage only in humanitarian relief activities. A 2005 law requires NGOs to pay taxes on imported materials, submit project reports every three months, renew their licenses annually, and meet government-established target levels of financial resources. No international NGOs have worked in Eritrea since the last were forced to leave in 2011. The government placed strict controls on United Nations operations in the country, preventing staff from leaving the capital.

The government controls all union activity. The National Confederation of Eritrean Workers is the country's main union body and has affiliated unions for women, teachers, young people, and general workers.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

The United Nations, in its June human rights report, said, "It is not law that rules Eritreans – it is fear." The judiciary, which was formed by decree in 1993, is understaffed, unprofessional, and does not issue rulings at odds with government positions. Most criminal cases are heard by the Special Court, composed of PFDJ loyalists chosen by the president. The International Crisis Group has described Eritrea as a "prison state" for its flagrant disregard of the rule of law and its willingness to detain anyone suspected of opposing the regime, usually without charge, for indefinite periods. According to the United Nations, most accused never get a court hearing and do not know why they have been detained. In 2013, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that there were between 5,000 and 10,000 political prisoners in Eritrea. They

include surviving members of a group from the ruling party who publicly criticized Afwerki in 2001 and a group of journalists detained the same year. Scores of people were arrested following a 2013 coup attempt, and no information has been released about them.

Torture, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and political arrests are common. Prison conditions are harsh, and outside monitors such as the International Committee of the Red Cross are denied access to detainees. Juvenile prisoners are often incarcerated alongside adults. In some facilities, inmates are held in metal shipping containers or underground cells in extreme temperatures. Prisoners are often denied medical treatment and many suffer poor physical health due to the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in which they are held. The government maintains a network of secret detention facilities.

The pastoralist Kunama people, one of Eritrea's nine ethnic groups, face severe discrimination for allegedly collaborating with Ethiopia in the 1990s. According to the United Nations, they have been the victims of extrajudicial killings and have been denied access to their traditional land. Same-sex sexual relations are criminalized and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals face legal and social discrimination.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 2 / 16

Freedom of movement, both inside and outside the country, is tightly controlled. Eritreans under the age of 50 are rarely given permission to go abroad, and those who try to travel without the correct documents face imprisonment. According to Eritreans who fled abroad, citizens even require written permission to move around freely inside the country. The authorities have adopted a shoot-on-sight policy toward people found in locations deemed off-limits, such as mining facilities and areas close to the border. Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers who are repatriated from other countries are detained.

The United Nations reported that authorities in Eritrea had forcefully evicted thousands of residents from their homes by destroying the property without due process. The military, security forces and known government sympathizers face no consequences for such illegal acts as property seizure.

A conscription system ties most able-bodied men and women – even those under age 18 – to obligatory military service and can also entail compulsory labor for enterprises controlled by the political elite. Testimony heard in a Canadian class-action lawsuit said conscripts were used in the construction of Eritrea's only commercial mining operation, partly owned by a Canadian company, Nevsun Resources Ltd. The official 18-month national service period is open-ended in practice, and conscientious-objector status is not recognized. The UNHRC describes this system as enslavement and concludes that through its system of open-ended conscription, the government "refuses to treat its citizens as human beings with rights, dignity and a free will."

The police frequently conduct round-ups of people thought to be evading national service; those who resist can be executed on the spot. The government imposes collective punishment on the families of deserters, forcing them to pay heavy fines and putting them in prison if they cannot pay. The government levies a compulsory 2 percent tax on income earned by citizens living overseas, and those who do not pay place their relatives in Eritrea at risk of arrest.

Women hold some senior government positions and some efforts have been made to promote women's rights, with laws mandating equal educational opportunity, equal pay for equal work, and penalties for domestic violence. However, traditional societal discrimination against women persists in the countryside. The government banned female genital mutilation in 2007, though the practice remains widespread in rural areas. Sexual abuse of women during military service is a serious problem.

The U.S. State Department's 2016 *Trafficking in Persons Report* expressed particular concern about forced labor among both residents in Eritrea and those fleeing the country, blaming the military's conscription policies and the government's tight control over travel.

Copyright notice: © Freedom House, Inc. · All Rights Reserved

Search Refworld

by keyword
and / or country

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Eritrea](#)

Topics

- [Crimes against humanity](#)
- [Democracy](#)
- [Elections](#)
- [Flight by land, air or sea](#)
- [Freedom of assembly and association](#)
- [Freedom of expression](#)
- [Freedom of religion](#)
- [Gross, systematic and large-scale](#)
- [Rule of law / Due process / Procedural fairness](#)