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World Report 2025 - Eritrea

The Eritrean government maintained an iron grip on its population at home and abroad. It continued to repress the population's human rights, including freedom of opinion, religion, and expression, and forced some children and much of its adult population into indefinite military/national service. Abroad, Eritrean forces committed ongoing abuses in Ethiopia's Tigray region and the government further restricted its citizens' rights.

Eritrea has had no elections since independence in 1993, and the unelected president, Isaias Afewerki, in power since independence, has not implemented a plebiscite-approved 1997 constitution guaranteeing civil rights and limiting executive power. Since 2010, no legislature has met. No political party except the Isaias-controlled People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) has been allowed to exist.

Unlawful detentions and enforced disappearances, notably of perceived critics, government officials, journalists, and alleged draft evaders, is widespread. In August, the former minister of finance, detained incommunicado since 2018 after he published a book calling for democratic reforms, died in [detention](#).

The government also severely restricted religious freedoms and unlawfully detained individuals of 'non-recognized faiths,' including children.

The government has intimidated Eritreans in the diaspora, resulting in increasing polarization between government supporters and opposition which [on occasion](#) resulted in violent clashes.

Eritreans continued to flee repression only to face deteriorating conditions in neighboring countries. In Sudan, where [hundreds of thousands](#) of Eritreans sought refuge before the country's conflict, Eritrean refugees have faced violence, and [abuses](#), including [sexual violence](#). Similarly, in Ethiopia, Eritrean refugees continued to face abuses in the conflict-affected Amhara region.

Eritrean forces still occupy parts of Ethiopia's Tigray region where they continue to commit sexual violence, [abduct civilians, and pillage livestock](#).

Despite being a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), Eritrea [refused](#) to cooperate with key international and regional rights mechanisms, including by denying access to the UN special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Eritrea and ignoring the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) decisions, and UN treaty body recommendations, including the human rights committee and committee on rights of the child. In July, the UNHRC renewed the special rapporteur's mandate.

Indefinite Military/National Service, Forced Labor

The Eritrean government pursued its uniquely abusive policy of indefinite military, national service, to control its population.

Although Eritrean law sets the duration of national service at 18 months, in practice, since the government declared a state of emergency in 1998, mandatory service has been extended indefinitely, as a result, most Eritreans serve for years, some for decades, with paltry pay and arbitrary punishments. The length of service is random, with no clear criteria governing its duration.

The government [once again](#) sent final year of secondary school students, including children, to the Warsai Yekalo Secondary School, located in the Sawa military camp, pushing them into military

service before completing secondary school, with a devastating impact on their education.

The UN special rapporteur on Eritrea [received](#) ongoing reports of conditions and punishments in military/national service that may amount to inhumane, degrading treatment, and torture. The rapporteur said that the circumstances of the work in service amount to forced labor.

Unlawful Detentions, Enforced Disappearances

Due process rights continue to be systematically violated in Eritrea. Political cases are handled extrajudicially. Detainees are subjected to arbitrary and prolonged detention without charges or trials, and are denied basic legal rights, including judicial review.

Arrests are frequently made without warrants or notification of charges, and many Eritreans, notably perceived dissidents, government critics, human rights defenders, religious leaders, and journalists, are subjected to enforced disappearance for years or even decades. Some are held in solitary confinement in undisclosed locations, while others are thought to have been killed or died in detention. In August, the former finance minister and critic of the president, [Berhane Abrehe](#), who had been held incommunicado since September 2018 died in jail. The fate of 11 former senior government officials known as the G-15, and 10 independent journalists [arrested since September 2001 remains unknown](#). Family members have never been allowed to visit them.

Freedom of Religion

Religious repression in Eritrea persists. Religious leaders and Christians affiliated with both the officially recognized and “unrecognized” faiths continue to face unlawful detentions and other abuses linked to their beliefs.

A religious freedom organization reported the arrests between January and May of at least 110 Christians including [children](#). Since 1993, the government has arrested and imprisoned Jehovah’s Witnesses without trial or formal charges. Security forces raided a home in September and arrested 24 people. Three days later, an 85-year-old female Witness who lived in the home was arrested. According to a religious freedom [organization](#), 63 Witnesses remain imprisoned solely for their faith, including 10, aged 70 and above. The UN special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Eritrea [reported](#) that children who are Jehovah’s Witnesses are intimidated and on occasion expelled from school for refusing to take part in nationalistic ceremonies.

Freedom of Expression and Association

Civic space in Eritrea remains closed with no opposition parties, independent civic organizations, or media. The government continues its systematic repression of dissent, routinely subjecting real or perceived critics to arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances. The government controls the domestic media. Independent media have been [banned](#) since September 2001. Nongovernmental gatherings of over 7 persons are prohibited.

The UN special rapporteur on Eritrea [reported](#) on increased transnational repression, with the suppression of dissent in the diaspora by Eritrean authorities, including through intimidation, online harassment, and the refusal of consular services. This contributed to greater mobilization of opposition groups, and polarization which has on occasion led to violent incidents and clashes between government supporters and opponents in several cities around the world over the past two years, including in [the Netherlands](#).

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

In Eritrea only [21 percent of women and girls](#) could access the modern forms of contraceptives they desired, one of the lowest rates in Africa. The maternal mortality rate (MMR) in the country stands at [322 deaths per 100,000 live births](#), almost 5 times the rate promoted in [the Sustainable Development Goals](#). A recent study attributed this to [preventable causes](#) including access and quality of antenatal care; poor referral mechanisms; and complications arising from unsafe abortion.

Violence against women and girls

Eritrea failed to sufficiently tackle ongoing violence against women and girls. [Child marriage is prevalent](#) with 13 percent of girls married by the age of 15, and 41 percent by age 18. Contributing factors include the [National laws](#) that define the age of marriage as 18 years but allow for girls aged 16 years and above to get dispensation, [social and cultural norms](#) and a high prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM). The UN special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Eritrea documented ongoing sexual harassment and sexual violence against female conscripts in a context of impunity.

Refugees and Returnees

Eritrean asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants, including unaccompanied children, continue to [suffer](#) arbitrary detention, secondary displacement, and violence in host countries. Over three decades since independence, about [half a million](#) Eritreans (roughly 15 percent of an estimated 3.8 million population) have fled.

As of June 2024, [over 150,000](#) Eritreans were registered as refugees in Sudan, many residing in camps in [southeastern Sudan](#). In Sudan's capital Khartoum in Rapid Support Forces (RSF) controlled areas, women and girls including Eritrean and other refugees have been [faced](#) with widespread sexual violence.

In Ethiopia, over 170,000 Eritreans were registered as refugees as of [May 2024](#). During the year, Eritrean refugees faced [violent incidents](#) and insecurity in camps in the conflict-affected Amhara region, according to [media reports](#). Since 2021, newly arriving Eritrean asylum seekers have been denied access to asylum procedures due to Ethiopia's suspension of asylum claim registrations, documentation issuance, and refugee status determinations.

Eritrean forces in Ethiopia

Eritrean forces [remained](#) in Ethiopia's Tigray region throughout 2024, where they continued to commit serious abuses. Eritrean soldiers have subjected women and girls to widespread sexual violence while reports of disappearances of men and [looting of livestock](#) in areas under Eritrean control persist.