

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	351
Land:	Eritrea
Kilde:	Human Rights Watch
Titel:	World Report 2021 – Eritrea
Udgivet:	13. januar 2021
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	18. januar 2021

HRW – Human Rights Watch

World Report 2021 - Eritrea

Two years on from the peace deal with Ethiopia, Eritrea's leadership has increased its regional and international diplomatic engagement, but without improving the plight of Eritreans through critical human rights reforms.

Eritrea's government remains one of the world's most repressive, subjecting its population to widespread forced labor and conscription, imposing restrictions on freedom of expression, opinion, and faith, and restricting independent scrutiny by international monitors.

Eritrea remains a one-man dictatorship under President Isaias Afewerki, with no legislature, no independent civil society organizations or media outlets, and no independent judiciary. Elections have never been held in the country since it gained independence in 1993, and the government has never implemented the 1997 constitution guaranteeing civil rights and limiting executive power.

In response to Covid-19, Eritrean authorities [increased pervasive controls](#) and movement restrictions on its population. From March, the government prohibited citizens, except those engaged in "essential developmental and security" tasks, from leaving their homes, unless for procuring food and medical emergencies.

The coastal Danakali region, predominantly inhabited by Afar communities—cross-border pastoralists—was especially [affected](#) by border closures. Media reported that the government intercepted [camel convoys](#) bringing foodstuffs from Djibouti and Ethiopia, a key food supply for local Afar communities. The government has also [confiscated](#) Afari fishing boats, thereby preventing access to food and income.

[In September](#), the government ignored its own restrictions on movement, its [ban on public transport](#), and its school closures, by channeling thousands of school students to the infamous Sawa military camp where all secondary school students must complete their schooling and simultaneously undergo military training.

Positively, Eritrea took part in the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) review. Although a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), it refused to cooperate with or grant access to the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea and publicly attacked her mandate.

Unlawful, Abusive Detentions

Mass roundups and prolonged arbitrary arrests and detentions without trial or appeal remain common.

Many detainees, including [government officials and journalists](#) arrested in 2001 after they questioned Isaias's leadership, are held incommunicado. In June, a daughter of journalist Dawit Isaak told media he was alive, but [without substantiating](#) the assertion. [Ciham Ali Abdu](#), daughter of a former information minister, has been held for seven years since her arrest age 15. Former finance minister and critic of the president, Berhane Abrehe, [remains](#) in incommunicado detention since September 2018.

Prisoners often do not know why they are being detained. Relatives are seldom informed of prisoners' whereabouts, sometimes learning of their fate only when a body is returned.

Authorities hold detainees in inhumane conditions. Facilities are overcrowded and unsanitary, [made worse by Covid-19 restrictions](#) that denied many detainees vital food parcels and sanitary products their families would have provided. For months, the government ignored [calls](#) by international rights actors to release those unlawfully detained to decongest detention facilities in response to Covid-19.

Eritrea has long criminalized consensual homosexual conduct; the 2015 penal code mandates imprisonment for five to seven years.

Indefinite Military Conscription and Forced Labor

The government took no steps to reform the country's national service system. It continued to conscript Eritreans, most men and unmarried women, indefinitely into military or civil service for low pay and with no say in their profession or work location. Conscripts are often subjected to inhuman and degrading punishment, including torture, without recourse. Conscientious objection is not recognized; [it is punished](#). Discharge from national service is arbitrary and procedures [opaque](#).

For secondary students, some under 18, conscription begins at Sawa. Students are under military command, are subjected to harsh military punishments and discipline, and female students have reported sexual harassment and exploitation. Dormitories are crowded and health facilities very limited.

The government continued to conscript youth, some perceived as seeking to evade conscription during mass round-ups.

No conscripts, including students, were released from Sawa during 2020, despite the risk of exposure to Covid-19. And, despite calls for reforms, including the separation of schooling from compulsory military training, in September the government again bused students to Sawa, forcibly channeling thousands of young people into national service.

The government assigns conscripts to military duties but many [are assigned](#) to civil service jobs or work on agricultural or construction projects. [In February](#), the Supreme Court of Canada [held](#) that the Canadian mining company, Nevsun, accused of using conscript forced labor at its Bisha mine could be sued in Canada for human rights abuses in Eritrea. In October, the parties announced they had [agreed to a settlement in the case](#) but the terms remained confidential.

The government continued to rely on poorly trained national service teachers, which affects quality of primary and secondary education, and teacher retention. [Conscripted teachers](#) have no say about where they will be assigned, the subjects they will teach, or the length of their assignment.

Some conscript pay was increased but it remains inadequate to support a family.

Freedom of Religion

The government “recognized” [only four religious denominations](#): Sunni Islam, Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholicism, and Evangelical (Lutheran) churches.

Eritreans affiliated with “unrecognized” faiths have faced imprisonment and have often been forced to renounce their religion, including by being tortured. In September and October, two nongovernmental organizations [reported](#) the release of [as many as 69](#) “non-recognized” Christians, some detained for over a decade—possibly due to fears of Covid-19 infection—on condition they signed property deeds to hold them liable for future behavior. But the government still arrested people because of religious practices, including during [wedding celebrations](#).

None of the 52 Jehovah’s Witnesses long incarcerated in Mai Serwa [have been released](#), including three jailed since 1994 because of their conscientious objections to military service.

Even “recognized” religions faced restrictions. A Catholic Church delegation led by the archbishop of Addis Ababa was refused entry at the Asmara airport and [deported](#). The Orthodox patriarch deposed by the government in 2007 and [expelled](#) from the church in 2019 because of “heresy” remained under house arrest.

In November 2019, 21 Muslims were [reportedly arrested](#) in Mendafera and Adi Quala, including a local imam; the whereabouts of many remains unknown. Media reported that [peaceful demonstrators](#) arrested in 2017 and early 2018 for protesting the government takeover of Al Diaa Islamic school were released in August; officials of the school remain incarcerated.

In January, Finn Church Aid, one of the very few nongovernmental organizations based in Eritrea, ended its activities after the government suddenly stopped [its teacher training project](#), which aimed to recruit teachers outside the national service system.

Refugees

Eritrea’s ongoing rights crisis continues to drive thousands of Eritreans into exile, with many children and youth escaping conscription.

In the first three months of 2020, [9,436 Eritreans fled to Ethiopia alone](#), a third of whom were children. In January, the Ethiopian government unofficially changed its asylum policy, which for years granted all Eritrean asylum seekers refugee status as a group, only registering some categories of new arrivals at the Eritrea border, excluding others, notably [unaccompanied children](#).

Among those fleeing Eritrea were [four football players](#) participating in a tournament in Uganda in November 2019. Some footballers defected at tournaments in 2015 and 2009.

Israeli authorities continued to systematically deny the asylum claims of the roughly 32,000 Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers in the country. However, in April, Israel’s Supreme Court struck down a law that permitted the confiscation of a portion of their salaries.

Key International Actors

More than two years after the Eritrea and Ethiopia declared peace, their border remains demarcated and Ethiopia [has not withdrawn from Badme](#), the Eritrean village that triggered the 1998 war. In 2019, Eritrea unilaterally closed the border. In March 2020, Ethiopia [shut](#) the border because of pandemic-related fears.

After having been [sued](#) by a European human rights organization and [criticized](#) by the European Parliament for [funding the procurement](#) of material for the construction of a road in Eritrea that employs conscript forced labor, the European Union announced it would fund “no more roads.” It also announced it would be conducting a review of its “dual-track” approach in Eritrea, which de-linked political and development policy with its development arm focused on job creation activities, and its political arm reportedly raising human rights issues. In contrast, a subsidiary of a state-owned Chinese company remains involved in building a 134-kilometer road.

In 2013, Human Rights Watch [documented](#) how a state-owned construction company, which regularly used forced conscript workers built part of the Bisha mine’s infrastructure.

Two mining companies that provide 20 percent of the country’s [income](#) are 60 percent owned by Chinese firms, and 40 percent by the government.

The development of a massive 50 percent Australian company-owned potash development project, the Colluli potash project in the Danakali region, [moved ahead](#). In May, the special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Eritrea [reported](#) allegations that the military had been clearing local Afar communities off their land around Colluli since 2017.

The Global Partnership for Education, a global education donor, [awarded](#) a US\$17.2 million grant to Eritrea, despite ongoing human rights abuses in the country’s education sector.

ecoi.net summary:

Annual report on the human rights situation in 2020

Country:

Eritrea

Source:

[HRW – Human Rights Watch](#)

Original link:

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/eritrea>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

13 January 2021

Document ID:

2043503

Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum
Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien
T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583
F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
Imprint & Disclaimer
F.A.Q.
Data Protection Notice

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

