

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	151
Land:	Eritrea
Kilde:	British Home Office.
Titel:	Country of Origin Information Report.
Udgivet:	17. august 2012
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	4. september 2012



ERITREA

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION (COI) REPORT

COI Service

17 August 2012

SECURING OUR BORDER CONTROLLING MIGRATION

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Annex G – Letter dated 11 October 2010 from the British Embassy in Asmara

Annex H – Letter dated 3 October 2011 from the British Embassy in Asmara

Annex I – References to source material

Preface

- i This Country of Origin Information (COI) report has been produced by COI Service, UK Border Agency, for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. The report provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The main body of the report includes information available up to 1 August 2012. The report was issued on 17 August 2012.
- ii The report is compiled wholly from material produced by a wide range of external information sources and does not contain any UKBA opinion or policy. All information in the Report is attributed, throughout the text, to the original source material, which is made available to those working in the asylum/human rights determination process.
- iii The report aims to provide a compilation of extracts from the source material identified, focusing on the main issues raised in asylum and human rights applications. In some sections where the topics covered arise infrequently in asylum/human rights claims only web links may be provided. It is not intended to be a detailed or comprehensive survey. For a more detailed account, the relevant source documents should be examined directly.
- iv The structure and format of the report reflects the way it is used by UK Border Agency decision makers and appeals presenting officers, who require quick electronic access to information on specific issues and use the contents page to go directly to the subject required. Key issues are usually covered in some depth within a dedicated section, but may also be referred to briefly in several other sections. Some repetition is therefore inherent in the structure of the report.
- v The information included in this report is limited to that which can be identified from source documents. While every effort is made to cover all relevant aspects of a particular topic it is not always possible to obtain the information concerned. For this reason, it is important to note that information included in the report should not be taken to imply anything beyond what is actually stated. For example, if it is stated that a particular law has been passed, this should not be taken to imply that it has been effectively implemented unless stated. Similarly, the absence of information does not necessarily mean that, for example, a particular event or action did not occur.
- vi As noted above, the report is a compilation of extracts produced by a number of information sources. In compiling the report no attempt has been made to resolve discrepancies between information provided in different source documents though COI Service will bring the discrepancies together and aim to provide a range of sources, where available, to ensure that a balanced picture is presented. For example, different source documents often contain different versions of names and spellings of individuals, places and political parties, etc. Reports do not aim to bring consistency of spelling but to reflect faithfully the spellings used in the original source documents. Similarly, figures given in different source documents sometimes vary and these are simply quoted as per the original text. The term 'sic' has been used in this document only to denote incorrect spellings or typographical errors in quoted text; its use is not intended to imply any comment on the content of the material.
- vii The report is based substantially upon source documents issued during the previous two years. However, some older source documents may have been included because

they contain relevant information not available in more recent documents. All sources contain information considered relevant at the time this report was issued.

- viii This report and the accompanying source material are public documents. All reports are published on the UK Border Agency website and the great majority of the source material for the report is readily available in the public domain. Where the source documents identified are available in electronic form, the relevant weblink has been included, together with the date that the link was accessed. Copies of less accessible source documents, such as those provided by government offices or subscription services, are available from COI Service upon request.
- ix Reports are published regularly on the top 20 asylum intake countries. Reports on countries outside the top 20 countries may also be produced if there is a particular operational need. UK Border Agency officials also have constant access to an information request service for specific enquiries.
- x In producing this report, COI Service has sought to provide an accurate, up to date, balanced and impartial compilation of extracts of the available source material. Any comments regarding this report or suggestions for additional source material are very welcome and should be submitted to COI Service as below.

Country of Origin Information Service

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Email: cois@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Website: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/policyandlaw/guidance/coi/>

INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP ON COUNTRY INFORMATION

- xi The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to make recommendations to him about the content of the UK Border Agency's COI material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on UK Border Agency's COI Reports and other COI material. Information about the IAGCI's work can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's website at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>
- xii In the course of its work the IAGCI reviews the content of selected UK Border Agency COI documents and makes recommendations specific to those documents and of a more general nature. A list of the Reports and other documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI or the Advisory Panel on Country Information (the independent organisation which monitored UK Border Agency's COI material from September 2003 to October 2008) is available at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>
- xiii Please note: it is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any UK Border Agency material or procedures. Some of the material examined by the Group relates to countries designated or proposed for designation to the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In such cases, the Group's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of

the decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself. The IAGCI can be contacted at:

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

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London, SW1V 1PN

Email: chiefinspectorukba@icinspector.gsi.gov.uk

Website: <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>

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USEFUL NEWS SOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

A list of news sources with weblinks is provided below, which may be useful if additional up to date information is required to supplement that provided in this report. The full list of sources used in this report can be found in [Annex I – References to source material](#).

AlertNet (Thomson Reuters) <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/index.htm?news=all>

All Africa <http://allafrica.com/eritrea/>

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

Cable News Network (CNN) <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/?fbid=i0gUtrVnUAY>

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) <http://www.irinnews.org/>

Reuters <http://www.reuters.com/>

Voice of America (VoA) News <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/>

The Home Office is not responsible for the content of external websites.

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Background Information

1. GEOGRAPHY

- 1.01 The Eritrea section of the Europa World Plus website, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012, stated that:

“The State of Eritrea, which has a coastline on the Red Sea extending for almost 1,000 km, is bounded to the north-west by Sudan, to the south and west by Ethiopia, and to the south-east by Djibouti. Its territory includes the Dahlak islands, a low-lying coralline archipelago off shore from Massawa...the major language groups in Eritrea are Afar, Bilien, Hedareb, Kunama, Nara, Rashaida, Saho, Tigre and Tigrinya. English is rapidly becoming the language of business and is the medium of instruction at secondary schools and at university. Arabic is also widely spoken. The population is fairly evenly divided between Tigrinya-speaking Christians (mainly Orthodox), the traditional inhabitants of the highlands, and the Muslim communities of the western lowlands, northern highlands and east coast; there are also systems of traditional belief adhered to by a small number of the population...the capital is Asmara.”

[24] (Eritrea - Country Profile)

- 1.02 Estimates of the total population of Eritrea vary. The BBC ‘Country Profile - Facts on Eritrea’ (updated on 7 December 2011), stated that Eritrea has a total population of 5.4 million (figure obtained from a United Nations source). **[25g]**. The United States State Department ‘Background Note on Eritrea’, updated 20 January 2012, stated that the estimated population of Eritrea in July 2011 was 5.9 million. **[3a] (People)**. The WorldStat.info website, accessed on 16 May 2012, stated that Eritrea had a population of 5,939,484 million in 2011. **[75]**. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) ‘World Factbook’ section on Eritrea, updated on 31 July 2012, stated that Eritrea has a total population of 6,086,495 (July 2012 est.). **[1] (People)**

See also [Ethnic groups](#) for details of ethnic demographics.

- 1.03 In the ‘Festivals and Public Holidays in Eritrea’ section of the [www.eritrea.be](#) website, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012, the following days are listed as Eritrean public holidays in 2012:

Date	Name of public holiday
1 January	New Year’s Day
7 January	Leddēt (Geez Christmas)
20 January	Timket (Epiphany)
10 February	Liberation of Massawa (Operation Fenkil)
8 March	International Women’s Day
13 April	Good Friday

15 April	Tensae (Easter)
1 May	International Labour Day
16-24 May	Independence Day festivities (one week)
24 May	Independence Day
29 May	Festival of Mariam Dearit (Keren)
20 June	Martyr's Day
28 June	Mariam Debre Sina
28 July - 5 August	Festival Eritrea Asmara Expo (one week)
11 August	Debre Bizen Abune Libanos
18 August	Eid Al Fitr
1 September	Anniversary of the Start of the Armed Struggle
11 September	Keddus Yohannes (Geez New Year)
27 September	Meskel (Finding of the True Cross)
25 October	Eid El Adha
11 November	Nidget of Saint Georghis Orthodox Church (Gejeret)
21 November	Nidget Saint Michaels Orthodox Church (Tseserat)
30 November	Nidget Enda Mariam Orthodox Cathedral
25 December	Christmas Day

[12a]

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MAP

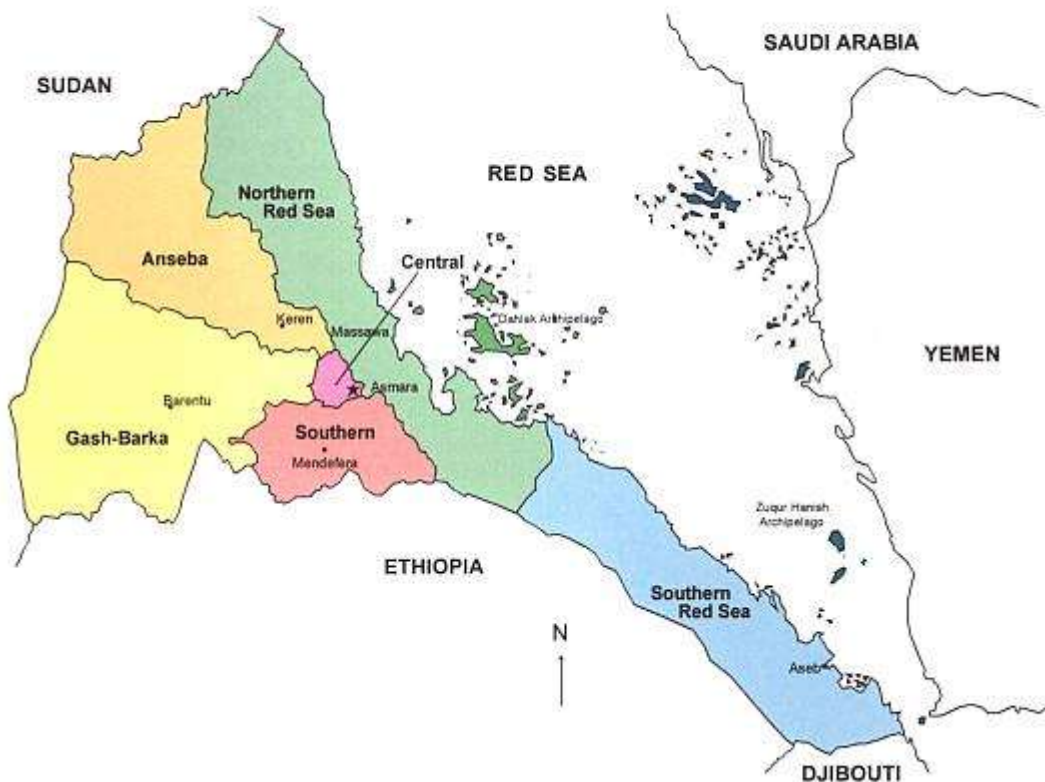
- 1.04 Map of Eritrea showing the main towns and cities obtained from infoplease.com, undated, accessed on .



Weblink to the above map: <http://www.infoplease.com/atlas/country/eritrea.html#axzz0zbwhqfLr> [4]

The following map from the www.eritrea.be website shows the administrative regions of Eritrea:

Regional Administration of Eritrea



Available at <http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea%20regional%20map.jpg>

More maps of Eritrea can be accessed using the following weblinks:

<http://www.geschichteinchronologie.ch/afrika/kol/Eritrea-Munzinger-d/012-karte-Eritrea.gif>

http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_NE-72ZXux-g/RtQTj99dN8I/AAAAAAAAABec/craeyVasIGk/s320/eritrea.gif

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2. ECONOMY

- 2.01 The Eritrea section of Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012, stated that the national currency is the Nakfa. **[24] (Eritrea - Business and Commerce)**. The XE Universal Currency Converter website, accessed on 16 May 2012, listed the following official market rates - one American dollar is equivalent to 15 Nakfas; one Euro is equivalent to 19.11 Nakfas, and one British pound is equivalent to 23.89 Nakfas. **[26]**
- 2.02 The United States State Department 'Background Note on Eritrea', updated on 20 January 2012, stated that the agriculture sector contributed 24 per cent to the GDP (2007); worker remittances and other private transfers from abroad contribute 32 per cent to the GDP. Eritrea has a real GDP of US\$2.1 billion (2010 estimate) with an annual growth rate of 2.2 per cent (2010 estimate), and a per capita income (in 2008) of

US\$640 (Purchasing Power Parity). The average inflation rate in 2010 was estimated to be 18%. **[3a] (Economy)**

- 2.03 The Heritage Foundation's (public policy institute) '2012 Index of Economic Freedom', published on 12 January 2012, provided an analysis of Eritrea's economy:

"Eritrea's economic freedom score is 36.2, making its economy one of the least free in the 2012 'Index'. Its overall score is 0.5 point lower than last year, reflecting large declines in fiscal freedom and labor freedom. Eritrea is ranked 45th out of the 46 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region.

"Poor governance and the lack of commitment to structural reforms continue to hamper Eritrea's economic freedom. The country performs very poorly in many components of the 'Index'. Long-standing problems include poor public finance management and underdeveloped legal and regulatory frameworks. The weak enforcement of property rights and the fragile rule of law have driven many people into the informal sector.

"The inefficient public sector remains the largest source of employment. Monetary stability remains fragile, largely reflecting excessive money creation to fund chronic fiscal deficits. Faced with substantial uncertainty and instability, the private sector has been marginalized to a great extent by the repressive environment. Open-market policies are not in place to spur dynamic growth in trade and investment." **[65]**

- 2.04 The International Crisis Group report, 'Eritrea: The Siege State', published on 21 September 2010, provided an analysis of the economic system:

"Hundreds of thousands of the most productive citizens – men and women between their late teens and 40s – are trapped in national service, unable to contribute significantly to economic growth. In the meantime, hundreds of young people illegally flee every month, a brain- and skill-drain that is a socio-economic catastrophe. The upshot is that the economy has been in suspended animation for several years. GDP growth has been declining steadily; foreign currency reserves are close to depleted; and the banking sector is crippled. One of the chief problems is that Ethiopia constituted about two thirds of Eritrea's export market; the closure of that market has been devastating, and factories and labour have been idle as a result. Sudan now accounts for the vast bulk of Eritrea's exports; imports – mostly machinery and transport equipment, food and live animals and manufactured goods – come from the UAE and Saudi Arabia, with smaller amounts from Italy and other European Union (EU) countries. There is scarcely an internal market, as ordinary Eritreans increasingly struggle merely to survive.

"National service puts large pools of labour at the state's disposal for commercial agricultural projects and the building of roads and dams; however, these are exercises in state control rather than significant contributions to economic development – many such projects are largely irrelevant, such as roads which carry little commercial traffic. National service labour is also frequently idle and unproductive. The transfer of youthful labour from rural areas to the army has crippled agricultural production.

"There is little or no domestic investment in agriculture, industry or services. Poverty is extensive and visible, even in Asmara...several other factors are relevant to an assessment of the economic crisis. The first, which has wider social implications, relates to land. The 1994 proclamation asserting that the state owns all land has created

anxiety and bitterness, not least because the government is willing to ignore local concerns in order to pursue its programs. It believes customary tenure and usage is inefficient and an obstacle to progress, though there is no indication yet that its commercial development policy will succeed...secondly, the PFDJ and the state control absolutely the private sector, co-owning the main financial and commercial institutions and running most industrial and agricultural enterprises and supporting services. The party has an enormous portfolio of commercial and industrial concerns and is the sole owner of, or senior partner in, a wide range of trade, financial services, transport, construction and other industrial enterprises. The private sector, such as it is, is extremely fragile. Would-be investors, particularly from the diaspora, have been discouraged by state interference, as well as the precarious economic and political environment...thirdly, the doctrine of self-reliance increasingly looks like folly. While much was made of this during the liberation struggle and the 1990s, when several major NGOs were asked to leave after they refused to hand over funds for the sole use of the state, Eritrea is now in increasingly desperate need of assistance.”

[18] (pages 14 and 15)

- 2.05 A Tesfa News report, ‘Eritrea’s economy to grow by 7.5% in 2012 - IMF’, dated 10 May 2012, stated that:

“Eritrea’s economy is projected to grow by 7.5 percent in 2012, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Driven largely by an increase in major infrastructure development, solid agriculture output and mineral exports, forecasts taken from World Economic Outlook (WEO) released by the IMF on April 17, 2012, reveal Eritrea will register the fastest-growing economy in East Africa this year.

“Despite high fuel prices and some macroeconomic imbalances hindering the economy, the Washington-based body said Eritrea’s consumer prices will decline from 13.2 percent in 2011 to 12.3 percent this year.

“After coming off of a red-hot 17 percent economic growth last year, the Red Sea state aims for 7 to 10 percent annual GDP growth levels between the years of 2012-2015. With the Zara and Koka gold mines both set for production in late 2013, Eritrea’s economy will likely expand by double-digit figures next year.” **[43b]**

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3. HISTORY

This section provides a brief history of the country from British control in 1949 to 2011, with the focus on the last 15 years. For further information about the history of Eritrea, see the United States State Department [Background Note on Eritrea](#) **[3a]**; and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office [Country Profile on Eritrea](#). **[10c]**

See also [Annex A](#) for a chronology of major events in Eritrea since 1952.

BRITISH RULE TO NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE (1949 TO 1993)

- 3.01 The Global Security website, undated, accessed on 6 January 2011, provided the following information about Eritrea:

“Following World War II, Eritrea was placed under British military administration and beginning in 1949, administered it as a trust territory of the United Nations. In 1950 the UN decided that Eritrea should become a part of a federated Ethiopia, who had long been trying to attain the territory with its vast Red Sea coast. In 1962 Eritrea decided to end the federation and completely unify with Ethiopia. However, this was not a position that all Eritreans agreed on and those who opposed the union began to fight limited guerrilla warfare and the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) was founded. Initially, the ELF was more nationalist and Islamic and received aid from Iraq and Syria, although as more Christians began to join the ELF became increasingly anti-capitalist. Internal divisions within the ELF led to the creation of the rival Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) in 1972, led by Osman Salah Sabbe, the former head of the Muslim League.

“After Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in a military coup in 1974 the EPLF and ELF united against the Ethiopian government. There was a marked increase in fighting and by 1976 the united Eritrean forces had pushed virtually all government forces out of Eritrea. There was yet another division within the Eritrean opposition as Osman broke from the EPLF and formed the Eritrean Liberation Front-Popular Liberation Front (ELF-PLF), a move that reflected personal rivalries and ideological divisions. The Ethiopians however could benefit from the massive amounts of aid and troops given to them by the Soviet Union and Cuba, and with this help the Ethiopians [sic] were able to defeat the Eritreans in 1978. It was not a total victory for the Ethiopian forces and there was a return to more limited guerrilla warfare where neither side was really able to take control. There was continued fighting between the guerrillas and government forces throughout the 1980s, but eventually the guerrillas were able to gain the upper hand, scoring several key victories against Ethiopian forces.

“In 1991 the rebels captured the Eritrean capital of Asmara and the ports, which essentially gave them full control of Eritrea. Soon after the UN scheduled a referendum on Eritrean independence which was approved by an overwhelming margin. The main leader of the EPLF, Isaias Afwerki, became the new country's first president.” [59]

3.02 The Eritrea section of Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012, stated:

“Following the liberation of Asmara by the EPLF [in May 1991], and of Addis Ababa by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a conference was convened in London, United Kingdom, in August 1991. Both the USA and the Ethiopian delegation accepted the EPLF administration as the legitimate provisional Government of Eritrea, and the EPLF agreed to hold a referendum on independence in 1993. The provisional Government, which was to administer Eritrea during the two years prior to the referendum, drew most of its members from the EPLF. The Government struggled to rehabilitate and develop Eritrea's war-torn economy and infrastructure, and to feed a population largely dependent on food aid. The agricultural sector had been severely disrupted by the war, and urban economic activity was almost non-existent.”

[24] (Eritrea - Historical Context)

3.03 The same source stated that the United Nations supervised a referendum on independence in April 1993, with a 99.8 per cent vote of Eritreans in favour of independence. The date chosen for Independence Day was 24 May (anniversary of the liberation of Asmara), and on 28 May 1993, the state of Eritrea was formally granted international recognition. Three institutions were set up to govern the state - the Consultative Council, the National Assembly, and the judiciary. One of the National

Assembly's first acts was the election of Isaias Afewerki, the leader of the EPLF, as President and Head of State. **[24] (Eritrea - Historical Context)**

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS (1994 TO 2002)

3.04 The Eritrea section of the Europa World Plus website, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012, stated that in February 1994, the EPLF became a political party called the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). In March 1994, the Consultative Council was replaced with a State Council, and the National Assembly was reconstituted to include 75 members of the PFDJ Central Committee, and 75 directly elected members. A Constitutional Committee of 58 members (50 of these members were government appointees) was set up to reorganise the country administratively. **[24] (Eritrea - Domestic Political Affairs)**

3.05 The Travel Documents Systems website, undated, accessed on 18 July 2012, provided the following information:

"In March 1994, the PGE [Provisional Government of Eritrea] created a constitutional commission charged with drafting a constitution flexible enough to meet the current needs of a population suffering from 30 years of civil war as well as those of the future, when prospective stability and prosperity would change the political landscape. Commission members traveled throughout the country and to Eritrean communities abroad holding meetings to explain constitutional options to the people and to solicit their input. A new constitution was ratified in 1997 but has not been implemented, and general elections have not been held." **[60]**

See also [Constitution](#).

3.06 The United States State Department 'Background Note on Eritrea', updated on 20 January 2012, noted that in late 2001, there was a clampdown against political opposition groups favouring elections and constitutional reform. As the source observed:

"In September 2001, after several months in which a number of prominent PFDJ party members had publicly aired grievances against the government and in which they called for implementation of the constitution and the holding of elections, the government instituted a crackdown. Eleven prominent dissidents, members of what had come to be known as the Group of 15, were arrested and held without charge in an unknown location. At the same time, the government shut down the independent press and arrested its reporters and editors, holding them incommunicado and without charge. In subsequent weeks, the government arrested other individuals, including two Eritrean employees of the U.S. Embassy." **[3a]**

3.07 The Human Rights Watch press release, 'Escalating Crackdown in Eritrea Reformists, Journalists, Students At Risk', dated 21 September 2001, also reported on the arrests of university students at this time:

"The recent clampdown on civil society and critical political voices was reportedly triggered by an increasingly tense standoff between the government and university students demanding greater academic freedom and social liberties, particularly the publication last week in a private newspaper of a long diary of a student on a forced summer work program.

“Students at the University of Asmara, the only one in the country, had joined in criticizing the government by demanding better treatment from the government and consultation on matters that concern them. The summer work program is mandatory for University of Asmara students, who are allowed to defer their national military service until after graduation. This year [2001], the students protested the appalling conditions of previous camps. On July 31 [2001], the police arrested the president of the Asmara University student council, Semere Kesete, a day after he publicly announced that students would not enroll in the summer program unless certain reforms were carried out. He remains in jail without charge.

“When students tried to protest his arrest at his court appearance on August 10 [2001], four hundred of them were rounded up and sent to the work program in Wia, a desert camp near the Red Sea port of Massawa, in a region where daytime temperatures hover about 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius). The government accused the students, who were not charged, of ‘unruly behavior’ and ‘unlawful acts.’ Following the forcible transfer of the arrested students to Wia, 1700 others ‘voluntarily’ joined them there, according to the government. The government acknowledged that two students died of heatstroke during the past month, but attributed the loss to ‘lack of adequate logistical support’ at the camp. There were reports that a number of other students were taken for treatment from heat exhaustion in closed military hospitals, and some may have died.” [29a]

- 3.08 An Open Doors (NGO) analysis paper on religious freedom in Eritrea (no title), dated 13 April 2009, submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council as a contribution to the Universal Periodic Review of Eritrea, stated that:

“In May 2002, the Eritrean government ordered all unregistered religious communities to close their places of worship and stop practicing their faith until they were registered. They had to apply for registration with the Department for Religious Affairs in the Office of the President in accordance with the 1995 Proclamation regarding legally elucidating and regulating of religious activities and religions declaration NO 73/1995, the full implementation of which had been delayed.” [62]

See also [Freedom of religion](#) for more information about the impact of this.

- 3.09 A German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) academic paper about the national service programme by Nicole Hirt, dated January 2010, stated:

“In summer 2002 the government announced the so-called Warsay Yikealo Development Campaign [WYDC]. The younger generation is referred to as warsay, meaning ‘inheritor’ or ‘follower,’ While yikealo denotes a wise elderly person, a term the government uses explicitly for the fighter generation. The younger generation is supposed to follow in the footsteps of the former fighters by internalizing and practicing the values of self-sacrifice, hard work and dedication to the Eritrean nation in the form of unlimited and unpaid service. The introduction of the WYDC meant de facto that the national service was no longer limited to 18 months (as a matter of fact, all those remobilized in 1998 had already spent years in the military) but rather became open-ended.” [67]

For more information about [National service](#), please see the section of the same name.

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WAR AND BORDER DISPUTE WITH ETHIOPIA (1998 TO 2009)

- 3.10 Regarding Eritrea's border conflict with Ethiopia, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office 'Country Profile on Eritrea', updated on 27 February 2012, stated that:

"A dispute over the ill-defined border with Ethiopia flared into military conflict in May 1998. There were an estimated 100,000 casualties. Hostilities concluded with the signing of the Algiers Peace Agreement of December 2000. This established the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) to delimit and demarcate the border and established a 25km Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) between the 2 countries. A UN peacekeeping force (UNMEE) was deployed along the TSZ in 2001. Following restrictions placed on UNMEE activities and staff by the Eritrean Government the UN Security Council formally terminated UNMEE's mandate in July 2008.

"The EEBC announced its decision on the border on 13 April 2002. Demarcation was due to follow in 2003. However, when it became clear that the town of Badme (where the hostilities started) had been awarded to Eritrea, Ethiopia challenged the EEBC's conclusions. In 2004 Ethiopia announced its acceptance 'in principle' of the EEBC ruling. In 2007 Ethiopia then stated its acceptance of the EEBC's decision 'without precondition' but has said relations need to be normalised between the two sides before the decision should be implemented. The international community continues its efforts to keep the peace process on track by underlining that the EEBC decision is final and binding and by urging both governments to engage in political dialogue. Unable to physically demarcate the border on the ground the EEBC instead issued a 'virtual demarcation' showing where the boundary posts should be placed." **[10c]**

- 3.11 The House of Commons Library, International Affairs and Defence Section, briefing paper, Ethiopia in the run-up to [the] May 2010 elections, dated 30 December 2009, provided a further update:

"The situation [regarding the border dispute] remains fundamentally unchanged since mid 2008, when the [UN] Security Council terminated the UN mission that had been operating on both sides of the border. There are still hundreds of thousands of troops facing each other in the border area. It is effectively a 'frozen conflict'. Both parties accuse the other, in pursuit of 'regime change', of providing political and military support to rebel groups operating on their territories...in recent months, UN involvement in the border dispute has been limited to the August 2009 final and legally binding ruling of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Claims Commission (EECC), a body established under the 2000 Algiers peace agreement to arbitrate conflicting claims for compensation for violations of international humanitarian law committed by both parties in the course of the war. The Commission blamed Eritrea for starting the war and awarded a slightly larger sum to Ethiopia (the outstanding differential is \$10 million). In a moderately hopeful sign, both parties accepted the ruling of the Commission."

[61] (The Eritrea-Ethiopia border dispute: Recent developments, pages 7-8)

- 3.12 The Sudan Tribune report, 'AU Panel urges new approach to settle Ethiopia-Eritrea border dispute', dated 17 December 2010, stated that the African Union's Panel of the Wise, at its 9th assembly in Algiers had urged a "launch for a new and binding peace process to resolve the long-standing border row between Ethiopia and Eritrea." The Sudan Tribune report explained that the "...African Union's Panel of the Wise held on December 12-14 expressed concerns over the stalled border crises saying a lasting

solution was needed. The panel urged the chairperson of the commission to envisage useful initiatives to help the countries resolve the outstanding issues and work towards the normalization of relations.” [57b]

RELATIONS WITH DJIBOUTI, SOMALIA AND SUDAN (2008 TO 2011)

- 3.13 A report published on the IOL website (South African online news service), entitled ‘Eritrea clashes claim more lives’, dated 12 June 2008, provided information about a border clash between Eritrea and Djibouti that took place in June 2008:

“Border clashes between Eritrea and Djibouti have killed nine Djiboutian soldiers and wounded 60 others in three days of fighting between the Horn of Africa nations, a defence official said on Thursday [12 June 2008].

“In the first fighting since the mid-1990s between two of Africa's smallest states, Eritrean and Djiboutian troops have exchanged fire along a part of their shared border overlooking strategic shipping lanes in the Red Sea.

“Djibouti hosts French and US military bases and is the main route to the sea for Eritrea's arch-foe Ethiopia.

“Africa's youngest nation, Eritrea has fractious ties with the West, which accuses it of backing Somali insurgents and impeding UN peacekeepers on the Ethiopia border...Djiboutian state media said the Red Sea state had captured 100 Eritrean prisoners.

“There was, however, no independent verification of events from the remote border area that has long been a source of tension between the two countries.” [63]

- 3.14 The United Nations (UN) press release, ‘Security Council Imposes Sanctions on Eritrea over Its Role in Somalia, Refusal to Withdraw Troops Following Conflict with Djibouti’, dated 24 December 2009, provided details about a UN Security Council resolution concerning Eritrea:

“[The UN Security Council is] Gravely concerned about findings that Eritrea had provided support to armed groups undermining peace and reconciliation in Somalia and that it had not withdrawn its forces following clashes with Djibouti in June 2008, the Security Council today [24 December 2009] imposed an arms embargo on that country, in addition to travel restrictions on and a freeze on the assets of its political and military leaders.

“Adopting resolution 1907 (2009) by a vote of 13 in favour to 1 against (Libya), with 1 abstention (China) under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, the Council reiterated its demand that Eritrea withdraw its forces to the positions of the status quo ante in the area where its conflict with Djibouti had occurred, acknowledge its border dispute and cooperate fully with the Secretary-General's good offices. It further demanded that the country cease all efforts to destabilize or overthrow, directly or indirectly, the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia.

“The Council demanded that all States, in particular Eritrea, cease arming, training and equipping armed groups and their members, including Al-Shabaab, which aimed to destabilize the region or incite violence and civil strife in Djibouti. It further demanded

that Eritrea cease facilitating travel and other forms of financial support to individuals or entities designated by the Committee established pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) regarding Somalia and other sanctions committees, in particular the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999) regarding Al? [sic] Qaida and the Taliban.

“Imposing an embargo on arms and associated materiel [sic] to and from Eritrea, the Council called upon all States to inspect all cargo to and from Somalia and Eritrea, and upon discovery of prohibited items, to seize and dispose of them. It decided that travel restrictions and an asset freeze should apply to individuals, including but not limited to, the Eritrean political and military leadership, so designated by the Committee on Somalia Sanctions, as well as to governmental and parastatal actors and entities privately owned by Eritrean nationals living within or outside Eritrean territory, so designated by the same Committee. Also by the text, the Council expanded the Committee’s mandate to undertake those additional tasks, as well as that of the Monitoring Group assisting the Committee.” [56]

- 3.15 The United Nations News Service report, ‘Ban Welcomes Deal Between Eritrea and Djibouti to Resolve Border Conflict’, dated 9 June 2010, stated:

“Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today [9 June 2010] welcomed the agreement signed by Eritrea and Djibouti to resolve their two-year border dispute through a negotiated settlement.

“Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki and Djibouti's President Ismail Omar Guelleh signed the agreement on Sunday [6 June 2010] in a deal reached under the auspices of Qatar and its Emir, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani.

“The Secretary-General is encouraged by this positive development, which he believes will contribute to long-term peace and stability in the Horn of Africa region,’ he said in a statement issued by his spokesperson in which he also voiced deep appreciation for the Qatari Emir's mediation efforts.

“The agreement entrusts Qatar with establishing a mechanism for the resolution of the border dispute and the normalization of relations between the two countries.

“The deal ends the dispute that erupted in early 2008 when, following weeks of tensions and military build-up, the two countries' armed forces clashed over an un-demarcated area in the Red Sea known as Doumeira, killing 35 people and leaving dozens of others wounded.

“In January 2009 the Security Council adopted a resolution demanding that Eritrea pull its forces from the disputed area and cooperate with diplomatic initiatives, and welcoming Djibouti's withdrawal of its forces to its positions before the dispute.” [54b]

- 3.16 The United Nations News Service report, ‘At General Assembly, Ethiopia accuses Eritrea of spoiling peace efforts in Somalia’, dated 29 September 2010, stated:

“Ethiopia today [29 September 2010] accused Eritrea of continuing to undermine efforts to restore peace and stability in Somalia by arming insurgents battling the transitional Government in Mogadishu and urged the Security Council to strictly enforce existing sanctions against Eritrea.

“Despite the sanctions, Eritrea is still the principal architect of the complicated situation in Somalia by training, arming and nurturing the extremist elements such as Al Shabaab and Hisbul Islam who are causing havoc in the country today,’ Ethiopia’s Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin said in his statement to the General Assembly’s high-level debate.

“In a resolution in January last year [2009], the Council imposed an arms embargo on Eritrea and a travel ban and an assets freeze on Eritrean political and military leaders who violated the embargo or provided support to armed opposition groups destabilizing Somalia.

“The resolution followed a request by the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU) for the Council to take such action.

“The time, therefore, is long overdue for the Security Council to take resolute action and see to it that its decisions are complied with if we are to maintain the integrity of the decisions of our organizations,’ Mr. Mesfin said.” **[54a]**

- 3.17 The Sudan Tribune report, ‘Ethiopia to step-up support to Eritrean rebels’, dated 16 April 2011, stated that:

“Ethiopia on Friday declared that it will increase its support to Eritrean rebel groups in their struggle to topple the regime of Issaias Afeworki.

“‘In light of Eritrea’s continuing nefarious campaigns’, Ethiopia has given up on ‘the passive approach it has pursued in the past in dealing with the Eritrean regime in Asmara’, thus ‘decided to carry out a more active policy, taking measured action against Eritrea’s activities’, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in its weekly press release published on Friday [15 April 2011].

“Last week, Addis Ababa threatened it might be forced to take military action against the Red Sea nation accusing it of continuous ‘terrorist acts’ and attempts to destabilize Ethiopia.

“The latest statement said: ‘No act of aggression by the government of President Isaias will be left unanswered’.

“Ethiopia has given refuge to a number of Eritrean resistance groups including Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA), a coalition of some nine political organizations.

“The Horn of Africa country hosts over 50,000 Eritrean refugees who fled home in protest to the current rule. Many of these refugees join Eritrean resistance groups in Ethiopia.

“Ethiopia has been providing political support to the Eritrean political groups and it says now the support to the opposition groups will be strengthened further.” **[57e]**

- 3.18 The Tesfa News (Eritrean news website) report, ‘Entry Visas Abolished between Sudan and Eritrea’, dated 11 May 2011, stated that:

“Sudan and Eritrea have agreed to open their common borders to facilitate passage between the two countries through ID cards without the need for entry visas.

“In addition, the two countries have agreed to facilitate goods and commodities traffic, without restrictions, organize inter trade and remove all border crossing points that hinder movement of citizens of the two countries.

“Eritrean President, Isaias Afewerki, said the close relations between Sudan and Eritrea has prompted governments of the two countries to work for facilitating natural movement of the peoples of the two countries...the Minister of Interior said the visit by the Sudanese delegation to Eritrea comes by within the directives of President Omer Al Bashir who has directed for the removal of all obstacles that hinder smooth traffic between the two countries.” **[43a]**

OPPOSITION POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS (2004 TO 2011)

- 3.19 The Eritrea section of the Europa World Plus website, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012, stated:

“During 2004 several parties took steps to form a viable opposition movement to the PFDJ. In February, following talks in Germany, the EPLF - DP [Eritrean People's Liberation Front Democratic Party] announced that it would reform as the Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP), under the continued leadership of Mesfin Hagos. In May numerous former members of the ELF [Eritrean Liberation Front] and the PFDJ combined to establish the Eritrean Popular Movement (EPM). In August two new coalitions were formed; the first united the EPM and four smaller parties under the umbrella of the Eritrean National Alliance (ENA), while the second brought the EDP, the ELF and the Eritrean Liberation Front - Revolutionary Council together. In late December representatives of these two alliances met in Khartoum, Sudan, for talks with the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, and the Sudanese President, Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, aimed at settling issues surrounding the border conflict with Ethiopia ...in 2004 the ENA was reorganized as the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA) and in January 2005 Hiruy Tedla Bairu was elected leader of the coalition. In January 2008 the 11 opposition parties comprising the EDA met in Addis Ababa to consolidate the alliance after divisions had emerged in the previous year. Two additional parties were admitted to the coalition: the Eritrean Islamic Congress and the Eritrean People's Movement.

“Hopes that national legislative elections would finally take place were raised in 2004 as elections to the regional assemblies were held in May with some 92% of registered voters casting their ballots.” **[24] (Domestic Political Affairs)**

- 3.20 The Asmarino report, 'Message from the National Commission for Democratic Change (ENCDC)', dated 28 October 2010, stated that an Eritrean National Conference for Democratic Change had taken place from 31 July to 9 August 2010 in Addis Ababa. A new organisation called the Eritrean National Commission for Democratic Change was set up. One of the aims of the new Commission is to bring the various elements of the Eritrean political opposition together to form a more united opposition against the Eritrean regime. **[68a]**
- 3.21 The Awate report, 'Eight EDA Member Organization (sic) Agree To Unite Their Military Wings', dated 9 May 2010, provided information about recent developments concerning the political opposition:

“On May 4, 2010, eight member organizations of the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA), an umbrella organization of Eritrean opposition forces, signed a memorandum of understanding to unify their military wings under one command.

“The eight signatories are:

(1) Eritrean Federal Democratic Movement (EFDM); (2) Eritrean Islamic Party for Justice and Development (EIPJD); (3) Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF, also known as ‘Jebha’); (4) Eritrean People’s Congress (EPC); (5) Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrean Kunama (DMLEK); (6) Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO); (7) Eritrean National Salvation Front (ENSF, also known as ‘Dehnet’ or ‘Inqaz’); and (8) Eritrean People’s Democratic Front (EPDF, also known as ‘Sagem’). Two additional member organizations of the EDA, the Eritrean Islamic Congress (EIC) and the Eritrean Nahda Party (Nahda), which do not have military wings, have agreed, in principle, with the memorandum of understanding.

“The agreement is a culmination of a sustained campaign by the constituencies and sympathizers of the organizations who, for over a decade, appealed to the leadership to eschew multiplication of fronts and work towards unity. After initiating many ‘confidence-building’ baby steps, the political organizations have been, of late, conducting coordinated military campaigns which are regularly announced in their websites.” [27k]

- 3.22 The Sudan Tribune report, ‘Eritreans demonstrate in Ethiopia against Asmara government’, dated 22 April 2011, stated that thousands of Eritreans living in Ethiopia took part in public demonstrations in various locations in Ethiopia, including refugee camps and Addis Ababa, the capital city. The protesters called for international pressure to bring down the regime of Isaias Afewerki [President of Eritrea]. The report stated that 60,000 Eritreans live in Ethiopia. The report also stated that the demonstrations followed accusations made by the Ethiopian government that Eritrea has been responsible for terrorist attacks. [57d]
- 3.23 The Eritrean Ministry of Information (Shabait) report, ‘People Welcomes May 24 With Sense of Patriotism and Pride’, dated 24 May 2011 (Eritrean Independence Day), stated that many Eritreans in Eritrea and abroad had celebrated the country’s Eritrean Independence Day with a “strong sense of patriotism and pride.” [46d]. The Sudan Tribune newspaper report, ‘Exiled Eritreans demonstrate against Asmara regime in Ethiopia’, dated 25 May 2011, however, reported that Eritreans living in Ethiopia organised demonstrations against the Eritrean government, with hundreds of Eritreans taking part in a demonstration in Addis Ababa. They denounced the current Eritrean regime and called for more United Nations sanctions to be imposed on the Eritrean government. The report added that, according to the organisers, similar demonstrations were being held in other countries throughout the world. [57a]

For more recent news reports on Eritrea, refer to the following weblinks: [BBC News](#); [Reuters](#); [All Africa](#); [Afrol News](#), and [Africa Online](#).

See also [Latest news](#); [Opposition groups and political activists](#).

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4. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS (DECEMBER 2011 TO JULY 2012)

This section covers the period December 2011 to July 2012 and provides a selection of incidents as reported by a number of sources on events in, and concerning, Eritrea. This section is organised thematically and then chronologically, from the oldest to most recent events. For further information generally, see the following links:

AlertNet (Thomson Reuters)

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/index.htm?news=all>

All Africa <http://allafrica.com/eritrea/>

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

Cable News Network (CNN) <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/?fbid=i0gUtrVnUAY>

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) <http://www.irinnews.org/>

Reuters <http://www.reuters.com/>

Voice of America (VoA) News <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/>

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- 4.01 A BBC News report, 'Eritrea: UN Security Council toughens sanctions', dated 6 December 2011, stated that:

"The UN Security Council has toughened sanctions against Eritrea after its East African neighbours accused it of continuing to provide support to Islamist militants.

"The resolution requires foreign companies involved in Eritrea's mining industry to ensure that funds from the sector are not used to destabilise the region.

"Thirteen council members voted for the resolution and two abstained.

"Eritrea denies the accusations.

"East African nations had called for tougher sanctions after a UN report found that Eritrea continued to support al-Shabab and other armed groups in Somalia.

"Early drafts of the resolution included measures like banning foreign investment in Eritrea's mining sector and blocking a remittance tax imposed on nationals overseas.

"But these were watered down because of opposition from some European states concerned they would hurt the Eritrean people, and from Russia and China, which abstained in the vote.

"Nevertheless Eritrea called the resolution outrageous and strongly denied the allegations against it." [25h]

- 4.02 An Awate report, 'Ethiopia Attacks Military Bases Inside Eritrea', dated 16 March 2012, stated that:

"On March 16 [2012], the Ethiopian government announced that it had carried out raids 18 kilometers into Eritrea and that it had destroyed three Ethiopian 'terrorist' bases in Ramida, Gelahbe, and Gimbi in the Afar region of Eritrea. The Ethiopian government also said that 'several Shaebian [Eritrean] soldiers and anti-peace forces were wounded and arrested' in the operation.

"The Eritrean government responded that there was nothing new to the Ethiopian attack, announced as it may have been with 'much bravado' by its media and its 'echo chamber' [Western media.] In a statement issued by its Foreign Ministry, the Eritrean

government said that the attack was a continuation of a 10-year long occupation of Eritrean territories and that the attack of Ethiopia and its 'backers' and 'protectors' was a way to distract attention from Ethiopia's internal crisis." [27j]

- 4.03 A BBC report, 'Eritrea "will not fight Ethiopia"', dated 16 March 2012, about the Ethiopian raids into Eritrea in March 2012, stated that:

"Eritrea has said it will not retaliate after Ethiopia's cross-border raid on Thursday [15 March 2012], easing fears of a new conflict between the long-time rivals.

"Those who rush to aggression are those who do not know what the life of people means,' Eritrean Information Minister Ali Abdu told the BBC...Mr Ali said Eritrea would raise the matter with the 'appropriate diplomatic channels', such as the UN...the people and government of Eritrea shall not entertain, and will not be entrapped by, such deceitful ploys,' a foreign ministry statement said." [25i]

- 4.04 An Awate report, 'Ethiopian Officials At Congress Of Start-up Eritrean Opposition Group', dated 2 April 2012, stated that:

"The Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Justice (EMDJ), a new political organization founded by Eritreans exiled to Ethiopian refugee camps, is convening its first congress in a camp near Shire, Ethiopia, close to the Eritrea-Ethiopia border.

"The organization, which claims it has an armed wing operating inside Eritrea, was founded in April 2011.

"The members of the organization are drawn from the Eritrean refugee camps in Ethiopia and they are mostly escapees from Eritrea's forced labor and indefinite conscription.

"The organization's political programme calls for the removal of Eritrea's ruling party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) and the establishment of a 'popular, democratic, federal government' which respects the rights of Eritrea's 'nations and nationalities.' One of these rights is the right to 'self-autonomy without restriction.' The similarity between the name of the organization and that of the ruling party carries to slogans: EMDJ's is 'Victory to the masses - in practice!'"

"EMDJ came to the attention of the Eritrean opposition for the first time in November 2011 when its representatives introduced their organization to the conferees of the Eritrean National Conference for Democratic change (ENCDC) in Hawassa, Ethiopia." [27i]

- 4.05 A BBC News report, 'US sanctions on Eritrea spy chief Negash over al-Shabab', dated 6 July 2012, stated that the United States had imposed sanctions on two Eritrean officials for supporting the Somali Islamist rebel group Al Shabaab. [25m]. A Reuters news report, 'U.N. mulls sanctions against Eritrean officials', dated 9 July 2012, noted that the Eritrean Foreign Ministry "accused the [UN Sanctions] committee of failing to validate the charges, and said the plan was part of a 'sinister ploy' by the United States, which it accuses of conspiring with its arch-foe Ethiopia to topple its government." [53b]. The same report also stated that:

“The U.S. Treasury named Col. Tewolde Habte Negash, an Eritrean intelligence officer, as his government's principal coordinator for assisting armed groups including the al Qaeda-allied al Shabaab in Somalia since 2004.

“It also said Col. Taeme Abraham Goitom had helped to shape the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia, an armed group whose members joined al Shabaab in 2010 and which has mounted attacks on Somali government soldiers and an African Union force trying to stabilize the country.” [53b]

See [Opposition groups and political activists](#).

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5. CONSTITUTION

- 5.01 The United States State Department ‘Background Note on Eritrea’, updated on 20 January 2012, noted that the constitution of Eritrea was ratified on 24 May 1997 but has not yet been implemented. [3a]. The Constitutionnet.org website stated that the Eritrean Constitution will guarantee fundamental human rights such as the right to life, liberty, freedom of movement, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, right to vote in elections, and right to a fair trial. Under the constitution, “all persons are equal before the law” and “no person may be discriminated against on account of race, ethnic origin, language, colour, sex, religion, disability, political belief or opinion, or social or economic status or any other factors.” The constitution also contains provisions relating to how the executive, legislature, and judiciary are organised and function. National unity, participation in national service and patriotism in general is emphasised. [41]

Link to Eritrean constitution:

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_126648.pdf [83]

See also [Political system](#) and [Judiciary](#).

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6. POLITICAL SYSTEM

- 6.01 The United States State Department ‘Background Note on Eritrea’, updated on 20 January 2012, stated that:

“The present government structure includes legislative, executive, and judicial bodies. The legislature, the Transitional National Assembly, comprises 75 members of the PFDJ [People’s Front for Democracy and Justice] and 75 additional popularly elected members. The Transitional National Assembly is the highest legal power in the government until the establishment of a democratic, constitutional government. The legislature sets the internal and external policies of the government, regulates implementation of those policies, approves the budget, and elects the president of the country. The president nominates individuals to head the various ministries, authorities, commissions, and offices, and the Transitional National Assembly ratifies those nominations. The cabinet is the country's executive branch. It is composed of 17 ministers and chaired by the president. It implements policies, regulations, and laws and is accountable to the Transitional National Assembly. The ministries are agriculture;

defense; education; energy and mines; finance; fisheries; foreign affairs; health; information; labor and human welfare; land, water, and environment; local governments; justice; public works; trade and industry; transportation and communication; and tourism.” [3a]

- 6.02 The International Crisis Group report, ‘Eritrea: The Siege State’, published on 21 September 2010, provided a detailed analysis of the political system:

“The PFDJ is the sole legal political movement and has dominated public and private life. At first glance, there is no distinction between party and state. However, the party is only one element of an amorphous apparatus centred on the president’s office. The PFDJ funded the war effort, as the government lacked resources. The party rather than government ministries inherited the EPLF [Eritrean People’s Liberation Front] legacy and its financial and moral capital, but it is only as important as the president allows at any given time. Since independence, and especially since 2001, his favour has alternated between the party and the army. Creating rivalry between the two institutions for Isaias’s favour is one of the strategies deployed by the Office of the President to maintain its importance.

“EPLF/PFDJ members dominate state institutions. From the early 1990s, all the main ministries - defence, interior, education, health, labour - have been headed by leading ex-fighters. Many of the lower rungs in the administrative structure have likewise been occupied by tegadelay [“EPLF fighter” (Tigrinyan)]. Posts were reserved for ex-fighters, and only exceptionally - notably in the banking sector - were key figures brought in who had not seen combat. It was axiomatic that there was no job - technical, commercial or administrative - that an ex-fighter could not do. This created a gulf between ex-combatants and everyone else, for whom there were relatively few opportunities. An independent, professional civil service is virtually non-existent, and those who work in the lower levels of an increasingly stultifying bureaucracy are demoralised, underpaid and inadequately trained. Civilians predominate in only a few areas, such as teaching. The university was led by a nonfighter between the mid-1990s and early 2000s and for a time was harnessed to the nation-building process, but as a key institution that is potentially a seedbed for alternative views, it has never been trusted.

“Even before the crackdown, the president frequently rotated ministers. Individuals who were out of favour were sidelined in largely meaningless posts. Today, those who criticise or question presidential edicts are ‘frozen’ from their posts for lengthy periods, permitted to do little but collect their salaries and not much else. Few of the early leaders remain in high public office, and the country is mostly run by second- or even third-tier revolutionaries or close associates of the president. Moreover, there is often duplication of responsibilities, with the president creating what are in effect shadow ministries; run by people who report to him directly, while the official ministry is left to compete for attention. Isaias increasingly appoints malleable individuals who lack a sense of direction or even discernible abilities but are eager to do his bidding.”

[18] (page 8)

- 6.03 The Freedom House report, ‘The Worst of the Worst 2012: Eritrea’, published on 9 July 2012, noted that:

“Eritrea is not an electoral democracy. The only legal political party, the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice, maintains complete dominance over the country’s political life and has become harshly authoritarian since the end of the war with Ethiopia. The

constitution provides for an elected legislature that would choose the president from among its members by a majority vote, but this system has never been implemented, as national elections have been postponed indefinitely. President Isaias Afwerki has remained in office since independence.” [9b]

- 6.04 Although no national elections have taken place since independence, local and regional elections have been organised. Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012, noted that regional assembly elections took place in May 2004. A total of 92 per cent of those registered to vote voted in these elections. [24] (**Eritrea - Domestic Political Affairs**). The Freedom House ‘Countries at the Crossroads 2011’ report, published on 4 November 2011, stated that:

“The PFDJ is Eritrea’s only legal party. It manages all local and regional elections, which are open to men and women of all religious and ethnic backgrounds, although no forms of political organization outside of the PFDJ are permitted. Voting for local office has been conducted in town meeting style sessions presided over by PFDJ cadres, who enforce public participation even as they manage outcomes. Campaigns are not permitted, nor are candidates allowed to set up political operations. Public discussion centers on the character of the candidates and their loyalty to the party. There is no public debate or discussion about policy and no outlet for new proposals or critiques of existing policies. New initiatives are only allowed if prepared by party functionaries and carefully vetted by the president’s office.” [9a] (page 3)

See also [Political affiliation](#); [Women - political rights](#); [Constitution](#).

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Human Rights

7. INTRODUCTION

7.01 The Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights stated on its website, updated on 27 June 2012, that the Eritrean government has ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. The website also stated that:

“Eritrea is party to only a small number of instruments of international human rights and humanitarian law, but not to the main instruments of international criminal or refugee law. It has signed but not ratified the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. It has not adhered to the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, but has ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on involvement in armed conflict.” **[21]**

7.02 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated:

“There were consistent and persistent reports of serious human rights violations. These abuses included, but were not limited to, harsh and life-threatening prison conditions that included torture and incommunicado detention, which sometimes resulted in death; forced labor of indefinite duration through the mandatory national service program; and the severe restriction of civil liberties including freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and religion.

“Other abuses included the following: unlawful killings by security forces; politically motivated disappearances; arbitrary arrest and detention, including of national service evaders and their family members; executive interference in the judiciary and the use of a special court system to limit due process; the detention of political prisoners and detainees; and infringement of privacy rights. They also included a lack of due process and excessive pretrial detention, and severe limits on freedom of movement and travel for all citizens, residents, and humanitarian agencies.” **[3b] (Executive Summary)**

7.03 The Human Rights Watch ‘World Report 2012: Eritrea’, published on 22 January 2012, summarised the human rights situation in Eritrea:

“Eritrea marked 20 years of independence in 2011, but its citizens remain victimized by one of the world’s most repressive governments. They suffer arbitrary and indefinite detention; torture; inhumane conditions of confinement; restrictions on freedom of speech, movement, and belief; and indefinite conscription and forced labor in national service.

“Since September 2001 or even before, Eritreans from all walks of life - government officials, leaders of government-controlled labor unions, businesspeople, journalists, and national service evaders or escapees - have been jailed for explicit or inferred

opposition to President Isaias Afwerki and his policies. The number of Eritreans jailed for such opposition is difficult to confirm, but ranges from 5,000 to 10,000, excluding national service evaders and deserters, who may number tens of thousands more. Twenty prominent critics and journalists have been held in incommunicado isolation for a decade; nine are feared dead.

“Prisoners are often held indefinitely without access to family members, prison monitors, or lawyers. There are no public trials and no appeals. Persons inquiring about a relative’s whereabouts risk being jailed themselves.” **[29b]**

- 7.04 The International Crisis Group report, ‘Eritrea: The Siege State’, published on 21 September 2010, provided an analysis of the general human rights situation:

“Eritrea can aptly be described as a prison state, without rule of law or independent judiciary and where the legal process is routinely ignored, and internal security is ever more oppressive and ubiquitous. The government has long demonstrated a cavalier attitude toward the law, including the safeguards critical to protection of civil society. From the early 1990s, the police were deliberately given excessive power, with no checks or monitors to curb them. State security targets suspect groups with relative impunity. One is Jehovah’s Witnesses, whose members refused to acknowledge the earthly kingdom being created by the EPLF, so did not participate in the 1993 referendum and refuse national service. To the EPLF, this renders them non-citizens and a legitimate target. The legal system functions primarily to bring dissenters to heel, without a formal legal code. Judges are not independent and are closely monitored. Moreover, the legal profession, like the enfeebled civil service, suffers from a chronic lack of skills and training...the government has become extremely suspicious of the outside world and paranoid about any Eritrean associated with ‘external influences’ and not fully committed to the ‘national cause’. Enemies of the state and ‘non-citizens’ are seen to come in many guises. In addition to that of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the persecution of Pentecostal Christians has escalated dramatically in recent years. Internal security forces monitor, harass and routinely detain those identified as practising ‘illegal’ faiths. The state recognises as legal faiths only the Lutheran Church, Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism and Islam. All others are regarded as dangerous, unpatriotic and ‘foreign’. Muslims belonging to new, unrecognised groups are likewise targeted, as are followers of the Bahai faith.

“Others who are jailed include, failed asylum seekers, businessmen and merchants suspected of hoarding goods or otherwise engaging in black market activities, journalists who have been critical or are suspected of being potential critics and a range of political dissidents, real or imagined, including those who in 2000-2002 expressed misgivings about the government. Draft evaders and deserters have swollen jails more than any other single category. There is deep and widespread fear of the security forces, and contrary political thoughts are rarely, if ever, voiced in public, and then only in hushed tones.” **[18] (pages 11-12)**

- 7.05 The Economist Intelligence Unit’s (EIU) ‘Democracy index 2011: Democracy under stress’ report, published in 2011, stated that the EIU’s 2011 democracy index ranks 154 out of 167 countries and places it among the 52 countries categorised as “authoritarian” regimes. Eritrea’s overall score in the democracy index was 2.34 out of 10. The Index of Democracy is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation, and democratic political culture. **[30]**

The 'Democracy index 2011: Democracy under stress' report, containing the full index and detailed methodology used, can be downloaded from this weblink:
http://www.sida.se/Global/About%20Sida/S%C3%A5%20arbetar%20vi/EIU_Democracy_Index_Dec2011.pdf. [30]

For information about specific human rights issues, see [Human rights violations by government forces](#); [Freedom of movement](#); [Freedom of speech and media](#); [Freedom of religion](#); [Freedom of political expression](#); [Freedom of association and assembly](#); [Prison and detention centre conditions](#); [Women](#); [Children](#).

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8. SECURITY FORCES

POLICE

- 8.01 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', published on 24 May 2012, stated that the:

"Police were officially responsible for maintaining internal security, and the army was responsible for external security; however, the government utilized the armed forces, the reserves, and demobilized soldiers to meet either domestic or external security requirements. Agents of the National Security Office, which reports to the Office of the President, were responsible for detaining persons suspected of threatening national security. The armed forces have the authority to arrest and detain civilians. Police generally did not have a role in cases involving national security, but they were heavily involved in rounding up individuals evading national service." [3b] (section 1d)

See also [Human rights violations by government forces](#).

ARMED FORCES

- 8.02 The Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) 'World Factbook' section on Eritrea (31 July 2012 version), stated that of the estimated 2.7 million military service reservists and military conscripts, around 1.8 million were fit for military service (2010 figures). [1]. The Eritrea section of Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012, stated that "...as assessed at November 2010, Eritrea's active armed forces included an army of about 200,000, a navy of 1,400 and an air force of about 350; reserve forces numbered 120,000." [24] (Government and Politics)

- 8.03 The Armed Forces section of Jane's 'Sentinel Country Risk Assessments' (21 September 2011 version), Eritrea, provided the following information about Eritrea's armed forces:

"In terms of capabilities, the Eritrean military remains overwhelmingly a light infantry force with little in the way of armoured, mechanised or artillery support. Development of the air force has aimed to overcome the strategic limitations of a largely conscript army as well as to match the expansion of Ethiopia's capabilities, which remain comparable and broadly constrained by the same factors. With no naval dimension to the conflict with Ethiopia, the development of Eritrea's small navy has stalled, although it may still

be considered a competent paramilitary force in the coast guard role...President Isaias Afewerki is the commander in chief of the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF), which consists of an army, air force and navy. Eritrea has one of the biggest land armies in sub-Saharan Africa, with conscription strictly enforced. By comparison with the army, the air force and navy deploy modest numbers of personnel. The commander in chief exercises control through a small number of trusted, long-serving associates. The key senior personnel are the minister of defence, the commanders of the five Military Operation Zones (MOZs), and the commanders of the air force and navy. During the 1990s it was understood that there was a chief of general staff overseeing a land forces commander, an air force commander and a navy commander. In more recent years the army has been organised on the basis of the five MOZs.” [7a]

- 8.04 The Freedom House ‘Countries at the Crossroads 2011’ report, published on 4 November 2011, stated:

“Eritrea’s armed forces, built out of the EPLF and reorganized as the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), consist of air, naval and ground forces whose commanders report directly to the president, as they did during the armed struggle. The EDF’s main official tasks are defending the country against external attack, ensuring peace and security along its borders, and helping to consolidate a national identity out of the diverse social forces that make up the new country. The EDF’s role has grown considerably, however, since the Border War with Ethiopia, after which Eritrea assumed a semi-permanent state of military readiness...the military remains under the president’s personal control, and he exercises direct command over the five theatre-operation generals – the de facto governors of the country’s five zobas (provinces) – while frequently ignoring General Sebhat Ephrem, his minister of defense.” [9b] (pages 9-10)

See also [National service](#).

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HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY GOVERNMENT FORCES

Arbitrary arrest and detention

- 8.05 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated that the:

“The law stipulates that unless there is a ‘crime in progress’ police must conduct an investigation and obtain a warrant prior to making an arrest. In cases involving national security, this process may be waived. In practice very few individuals were arrested with a warrant. The law stipulates that detainees must be brought before a judge within 48 hours of arrest and may not be held more than 28 days without being charged with a crime. In practice suspects were detained for much longer periods without being brought before a judge, charged with a crime, or in some cases even understanding the reason for their detention. Authorities also often changed the charges against detainees during detention. The government argued that those detained without charge can be assumed to be charged under national security grounds.” [3b] (section 1d)

- 8.06 The same source further stated that:

“Security force personnel detained individuals for reasons such as evading national service, criticizing the government, practicing one’s religious beliefs, and for unspecified

alleged national security reasons. Numerous persons were detained, even if they had valid papers showing they had completed or were exempt from national service. In practice most detainees were informally charged with violations relating to national service, effectively allowing [the] authorities to incarcerate citizens indefinitely.”

[3b] (section 1d)

See also [Arrest and detention - legal rights](#); [Detention of national service conscripts](#).

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Torture

- 8.07 The Amnesty International ‘Annual Report 2012: The state of the world’s human rights’, covering events in 2011, published on 24 May 2012, stated that: “Many detainees were held in underground cells or metal shipping containers, often in desert locations and therefore suffered extremes of heat and cold...torture and other ill-treatment of detainees were frequent. Prisoners were forced to undertake painful and degrading activities, and were tied with ropes in painful positions for long periods.” **[6b]**

See [Prison and detention centre conditions](#).

- 8.08 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) ‘Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea’ report, published on 16 April 2009, stated: “According to eyewitness accounts gathered by Human Rights Watch, torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment by military officers and commanders are systematic and ‘normal’...in Eritrea, deaths in custody are common as a result of ill-treatment, torture, and denial of medical treatment.” **[29c] (p29-30)**

- 8.09 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated that:

“The law and unimplemented constitution prohibit torture. However, torture and beatings are institutionalized within prison and detention centers. Reports of prisoners’ deaths due to torture, poor sanitation, and inadequate medical treatment were common, although secrecy and lack of access make it impossible to determine the number of deaths.

“Security forces tortured and beat army deserters, draft evaders, persons living near mining camps, persons attempting to flee the country without travel documents, and members of certain religious groups. Torture or mistreatment included prolonged sun exposure in temperatures of up to 120 degrees Fahrenheit; the binding of hands, elbows, and feet in contorted positions for extended periods of time; forcing inmates to walk barefoot on sharp objects; overcrowded conditions; exposure to extreme heat from confinement in crowded and unventilated metal shipping containers or in crowded cement-lined underground pits without ventilation or sanitation; suspension from trees with arms tied behind the back, a technique known as ‘almaz’ (diamond); and being placed face down with hands tied to feet outside in the desert, a technique known as the ‘helicopter,’ while pouring sugar on detainees to attract biting insects. The government sanctioned these torture and abuse methods, and no known action was taken during the year [2011] to punish the perpetrators.” **[3b] (section 1c)**

- 8.10 The HRW 'Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea' report, published on 16 April 2009, describes the various torture methods used on prisoners in military detention. According to the report, the names of the known different types of torture are:

'Helicopter' - the victim's hands and feet are tied together behind the back. The victim is left face down, often outside in the sun. According to former detainees, this form of torture is practiced in most of the prisons, in particular in Alla prison.

'Otto' (or 'eight') - the victim's hands are tied together behind the back, and the victim has to lie on his or her stomach. According to former detainees, this was the most common form of torture, practiced in all the prisons, and also in Wi'a and Sawa military camps.

'Ferro' - the victim's hands are placed behind the back and the wrists are bound together with handcuffs. The victim is made to lie on his or her stomach. The victim may also be left outside in the sun. According to a former army officer, 'ferro' was often the punishment for individuals suspected of being army deserters.

'Jesus Christ' - the victim is crucified by being tied up with rope to a tree or a cross and then left to hang in that position. Sometimes the victim is also beaten while in the hung position.

'Goma' - the victim is placed in a radial truck tyre in a double-bent position for long periods of time.

'Mock drowning' - the victim's head is submerged in water as an act of 'mock drowning'.

'Beating' - according to former detainees, beatings are a common punishment and take place on a regular, often daily, basis. Beatings can occur before or after other forms of torture. **[29c] (p30-32)**

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Extra-judicial killings

- 8.11 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', published on 24 May 2012, stated that:

"The government committed arbitrary killings. The government continued to subject detainees to harsh and life-threatening prison conditions, including torture that resulted in deaths during the year [2011]. For example, credible sources reported the death of three religious prisoners in Metier prison due to torture and complications from untreated diseases. Additional deaths resulted from the continued authorization of the use of lethal force against individuals resisting or attempting to flee military service or found in prohibited regions near the border or mining camps." **[3b] (section 1a)**

- 8.12 The Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights 2009 report, 'The Lasting Struggle for Freedom in Eritrea - Human Rights and Political Development, 1991-2009', stated:

"There are also numerous reports of summary executions or people being tortured to death, carried out by military personnel in the many military detention camps throughout the country. Extrajudicial killings take place not only in detention centres and prisons,

but also in the context of everyday life in rural and urban areas. A number of people have been shot near the Sudanese and Ethiopian borders, allegedly for attempting to cross the border illegally. Apparently, military personnel on the border have standing orders to shoot on sight if people are attempting to flee the country. Furthermore, the government has authorised the use of lethal force against anyone resisting or attempting to flee during military searches for deserters and draft evaders in the cities; a practice that reportedly has resulted in many deaths.” **[19] (p14)**

- 8.13 The HRW ‘Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea’ report, published on 16 April 2009, stated:

“Human Rights Watch were told by a number of sources that there is an official ‘shoot-to-kill’ policy in operation against all those trying to cross the border. A former officer in exile told Human Rights Watch that such an order was in effect: ‘Now the law is killing people for crossing the border. The law changed one year ago’. Another more senior officer, specified: ‘There was a circular. There has been such a large number of people [crossing] that there was an announcement that anyone who crosses the border will be shot.’” **[29c] (p39)**

AVENUES OF COMPLAINT

- 8.14 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated that: “Reports were common that [the] police demanded bribes to release detainees and that military personnel systematically accepted money to smuggle citizens from the country and cooperated with human trafficking groups. There were no mechanisms to address allegations of official abuse, and impunity was a problem.” **[3b] (section 4)**

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9. NATIONAL SERVICE (INCLUDING MILITARY SERVICE)

The information in this section has been obtained from a number of sources, which give differing information about national service and how it is implemented in practice. For example, sources differ on at what age national service starts and ends for men and women. As a result, it is not possible to be definitive about how the legislation governing national service and the other aspects of national service are implemented in practice.

BACKGROUND

- 9.01 A German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) academic paper about the national service programme by Nicole Hirt, dated January 2010 (GIGA paper 2010), stated:

“In November 1991 the provisional government of Eritrea, formerly the Eritrea People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), introduced a mandatory national service (Proclamation 18/1991) for all Eritreans, male and female, aged 18 to 40. Initially, this service included six months of military training and 12 months of work on reconstruction and development projects. One important aim of the national service is ‘to serve as an instrument for socializing Eritrean youth into the values and characteristics of the

EPLF'. Although there has not been much enthusiasm for the program since its beginning, it was initially accepted as a national duty. In early 1998, a few months before the war with Ethiopia started, a national development campaign was announced and all those who had finished their national service were remobilized. When the war started, they were directly integrated into their specific army positions. Since the end of the war in 2000 there has been no significant demobilization of the army, which consists of more than 350,000 people, while every year new rounds of young men and women have been drafted.

"In summer 2002 the government announced the so-called Warsay Yikealo Development Campaign [WYDC]. The younger generation is referred to as warsay, meaning 'inheritor' or 'follower,' While yikealo denotes a wise elderly person, a term the government uses explicitly for the fighter generation. The younger generation is supposed to follow in the footsteps of the former fighters by internalizing and practicing the values of self-sacrifice, hard work and dedication to the Eritrean nation in the form of unlimited and unpaid service. The introduction of the WYDC meant de facto that the national service was no longer limited to 18 months (as a matter of fact, all those remobilized in 1998 had already spent years in the military) but rather became open-ended." [67]

- 9.02 The International Crisis Group report, 'Eritrea: The Siege State', published on 21 September 2010, also provided background information about the national service programme:

"Eritrea is a highly militarised society shaped by war, run by warriors and in which citizenship has come to be equated with indefinite national service - associated not with rights but with obligations. The ethos of the armed struggle permeates all aspects of public life, and the country has proved unable, as yet, to escape its violent past. Immediately after independence, the EPLF [Eritrean People's Liberation Front] created a system of national service, the core component of which was military, centred on the training camp at Sawa, where it sought to inculcate the next generation with the culture and spirit of the liberation struggle. Sawa was conceived as the foundation stone of the nation-building process. Initially, it was a potentially constructive arrangement: all men and women between the ages of eighteen and 50 were to undergo six months of military training, followed by twelve months either of active duty deployment or developmental work.

"Several such rounds were completed between 1993 and 1998. However, the war with Ethiopia brought a fundamental change, as the national service commitment became, in effect, indefinite. Young Eritreans were swiftly absorbed into a military machine with little prospect of eventual demobilisation or even appropriate levels of leave. In 2002, this was formalised by the creation of the Warsai Yikalo ["those who follow the powerful"] development campaign, which amounted to the institutionalisation of the liberation struggle on a massive scale. Today hundreds of thousands are trapped in the system, since despite commitments made after the 2000 ceasefire, the demobilisation program is largely suspended. The small groups which have been released from time to time are often composed of those who are chronically ill, and their numbers are swiftly replaced by new recruits caught in periodic round-ups.

"The government's position is that national service is necessary for nation-building, to imbue younger people with a sense of loyalty, discipline and patriotism and to break down regional, ethnic and religious barriers. It defends the prominent role of the military,

arguing that Eritrea is surrounded by enemies, so cannot afford to let down its guard.”
[18] (pages 9-10)

- 9.03 The Eritrea section (29 June 2009 update) of the ‘War Resisters International’ website, accessed on 31 May 2012, provided the following information:

“In 1991 the provisional government of Eritrea introduced compulsory national service, including military service (Decree no. 11/1991 of 6 November 1991). However, until May 1994, the 1991 decree was not implemented.

“After officially achieving independence from Ethiopia in 1993, the 1991 Decree was initially revised (Decree 71/1995), but later replaced with the 23 October 1995 Decree on national service [Proclamation No 82/1995].” **[64]**

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NATIONAL SERVICE PROCLAMATION 82/1995

- 9.04 The National Service Proclamation No 82/1995 issued by the Eritrean government on 23 October 1995 sets out the national service requirements in full. Article 2 of the Proclamation stated that: “‘National Service’ will mean the general service that a citizen will give in active national service and in reserve military service, under the present proclamation... ‘Active National Service’ will mean the training and service that a citizen [referred to as a “Trainee”] fit for national service under Article 8 of this proclamation will undergo for 18 months”. **[13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)**
- 9.05 Article 6 of the National Service Proclamation states that: “...any Eritrean citizen from 18 to 50 years of age has the obligation of carrying out national service.” Article 8 of the Proclamation states that: “...all Eritrean citizens from the age of 18 to 40 years have the compulsory duty of performing Active National Service. Active National Service consists of six months of training in the National Service Training Center and 12 months of active military service and development tasks in military forces for a total of 18 months.” The use of the term “active national service” in the National Service Proclamation refers to military training and national service duties but does not include reserve military service. **[13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)**
- 9.06 Article 9 states that “...any Eritrean citizen from the age of 18 to 40 years called upon to undertake active national service has the compulsory duty of undertaking military training for six months in the National Service Military Training Center”. Article 13 (i) adds that anyone declared unfit for military training may be obliged to undertake 18 months of active national service in “any public and Government organ according to their capacity and profession.” **[13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)**
- 9.07 Article 11 of the National Service Proclamation states that citizens have to register at a registration centre for national service when called upon to do so by the Ministry of Defence. Youths who are 17 years old are expected to register for national service at a registration centre without being formally instructed to by the Ministry of Defence. **[13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)**

- 9.08 Article 12 of the National Service Proclamation covers the categories of people who are exempt from “Active National Service”, and these are: “(1) The citizens who have performed National Service before the promulgation of this proclamation; “(2) All Fighters and Armed peasants who have proved to have spent all their time in the liberation struggle;” **[13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)**
- 9.09 Article 13 of the National Service Proclamation covers individuals who are unfit for military service and states that:
- “(1) Those citizens who have been declared unfit for military [service] by the Board composed of the Ministry of Regional Administration of other Government Organs under the directives given by the Ministry of Defence will undertake 18 months of National Service in any public and Government organ according to their capacity and profession.
- “(2) After completing 18 months of service they will have the compulsory duty of serving according to their capacity until the expiry of 50 years of age under mobilization or emergency situation directives given by the Government.” **[13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)**
- See [Exemption on medical grounds](#).
- 9.10 Article 14 of the National Service Proclamation covers exemptions that are only valid for a limited period, and mainly affects students. Article 15 of the Proclamation deals with medical exemptions and states that individuals who are disabled, blind or suffer from psychological derangement, can be given official exemption from all types of national service - not just military service. Article 16 of the Proclamation states that the Ministry of Defence decides what type of national service individuals have to complete. **[13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)**
- See [Exemption on medical grounds](#).
- 9.11 Article 17 sets out the regulations that relate to exit from the country when either being eligible for the draft or performing national service. According to this Article, an Eritrean citizen eligible for national service may travel abroad “upon giving evidence that he is exempted from National Service or that he has completed his service by producing a Certificate of Service” or, alternatively, by “producing a registration card and entering into a bond of 60,000 Birr as security that he will return to resume his duty when called upon to do so.” Article 18 of the Proclamation states that the Ministry of Defence has the responsibility to resolve problems individuals may have with the length and nature of national service they have to undergo. **[13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)**
- See also [Demobilisation](#).
- 9.12 Article 21(1) of the National Service Proclamation stated that “during a mobilization or war period anyone in Active National Service is under the obligation of remaining even beyond the prescribed period unless the concerned Authority allows him to leave officially.” **[13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)**
- 9.13 Article 22 of the National Service Proclamation provides details of the rights and privileges of the individuals in national service. These include food, lodging, transport, uniform, medical services, and payment. Individuals who have completed active national service have the right to return to their previous employment - whether this is in the public sector or private sector.

9.14 Articles 23 to 32 of the National Service Proclamation deals with service in the reserve army. Article 23 states that:

“1) -The citizen[s] mentioned below are subject to compulsory service in [the] reserve Army:

- Anyone that has completed active National Service;
- Anyone that was rehabilitated because he had joined the Armed Struggle; Fighters and militia in civil life.
- Former fighters working in private, public and government work;
- Citizens who have been discharged from the army or Police.

2) -The citizens mentioned in Sub-Art. (1) of this article have the compulsory duty of service until the age of 50.” **[13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)**

9.15 Article 37 relates to the penalties for evading national service duties, including attempts to evade national service by deliberate self-inflicted injury.
[13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)

The full text of National Proclamation 82/1995 can be accessed using the weblink below:

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,LEGAL,,LEGISLATION,ERI,,3dd8d3af4,0.html>

See also [Exemptions](#); [Penalties for evading national service](#); [Exit and return](#).

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NATIONAL SERVICE IN PRACTICE

9.16 The United States State Department ‘Trafficking in Persons Report 2012’, published on 19 June 2012, stated:

“Under the Proclamation of National Service (No. 82/1995), men aged 18 to 54 and women aged 18 to 47 are required to provide 18 months of military and non-military service in any location or capacity chosen by the government. Some national service conscripts, however, are required to continue their service indefinitely, beyond the duration specified by law, with many required to serve in their positions for over 10 years under the threat of inhuman treatment, including harsh working conditions, torture, or punishment of their families. There continue to be reports that some Eritrean conscripts are forced to build private homes for army officers, as well as to perform agricultural labor on farms and construction activities for firms owned by the state, the ruling party, senior army officers, and private investors, functions outside the scope of the proclamation. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Education continued Mahtot, a national program in which schools send children to build stone terraces, maintain roads, and lay power lines. The military’s four command zones reportedly use conscripted labor to undertake diversified economic activities, including trading, farming, property development, and infrastructure construction, for the enrichment of the government, the ruling party, and high-ranking army officers. National service conscripts

could not resign from their jobs or take new employment, received no promotions or salary increases, and could not leave the country because they were denied passports or exit visas. Some national service members were assigned to return to their civilian jobs while nominally kept in the military because their skills were deemed critical to the functioning of the government or the economy; these individuals continued to receive only their national service salary and were required to forfeit to the government any money earned above and beyond that salary.” **[3d] (Eritrea section)**

- 9.17 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) report ‘Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea’, published on 16 April 2009, stated:

“Although the war with Ethiopia ended in 2000, in May 2002 the government introduced the Warsai Yekalo Development Campaign (WYDC), a proclamation that indefinitely extended national service...the WYDC was a national effort in which the generation that had fought for independence would join with new recruits to build the nation. In effect, it meant the forced conscription of every adult male up to the age of 50, although some refugees claim 55 is now the upper limit, with other sources claiming up to 57 for men and 47 for women...not all national service is military service, since many conscripts are not deployed in the army but on civilian projects, or are assigned to commercial enterprises with their salary paid to the Ministry of Defence. However, the Ministry of Defence is in control of the national service program and if someone working on a construction project were to abscond they are still be [sic] regarded as a deserter under military law.

“Refugees interviewed by Human Rights Watch emphasized that there was no difference between military and civilian national service - conscripts are equally at the mercy of the state...military duties are only one of a number of different assignments that conscripts can be tasked with, although it is the most common.”

[29c] (pages 43-44)

- 9.18 The British Embassy in Asmara, in a letter dated 1 April 2010 (Annex E), provided the following information, obtained from Eritrean sources:

“Officially, the Eritrean Ministry of Defence runs the military/national service programme. However, in practice other ministries are involved in the assignment of people to national service positions in ministerial dependencies...when students finish school in the Sawa military/school camp, they are automatically assigned to either military service, another type of national service or further education, and are given the relevant documents to that effect at that time. Other Eritreans are forcefully brought into military/national service as a result of round-ups or house searches. Military service or national service call-up documents are not issued to these individuals and they are not informed in advance that they have to undergo military/national service...in principle, individuals have no choice about their military/national service assignment though some may be able to influence where (e.g Asmara). Individuals are generally arbitrarily transferred by their commanders or supervising officers. There are no standard rules with regard to such transfers.”

- 9.19 The Human Rights Watch ‘World Report 2012: Eritrea’, published on 22 January 2012, stated that:

“Since 2002 Eritrea has misused its national service system to keep a generation of Eritreans in bondage. Service is indefinitely prolonged, extending for much of a citizen’s working life. Pay is barely sufficient for survival. Recruits are used as cheap labor for

civil service jobs, development projects, and the ruling party's commercial and agricultural enterprises. Female recruits have reported sexual abuse by higher-ranking officers." [29b]

- 9.20 The Awate report, '21st Round: 'Yimerena'lo", dated 13 July 2007, stated that students were sent to different military training centres, based on their examination results:

"The 21st [national service] round includes two groups: those assigned to Sawa and those assigned to WiA. The Sawa contingent left on July 4th [2007]; a day later, the WIA contingent followed suit. The difference in assignments is based on examination results: those who score 50 or higher are sent to Sawa and those who score below 50 are sent to WiA.

"Sawa military camp, which long had been a dreaded destination, has suddenly emerged as a premium choice simply because it compares favorably to WiA, an even more punishing landscape." [27n]

- 9.21 The HRW 'Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea' report, published on 16 April 2009, stated:

"After six months of compulsory military training, national service conscripts are deployed indefinitely in one of several possible activities. Many conscripts are simply drafted into military service and are deployed in regular military units. One refugee interviewed by Human Rights Watch was sent to work as clerk in a court in Asmara, another was sent to work as a mechanic in a civilian garage repairing trucks in Asmara. Others described working on farms or mines owned by the state or the PFDJ ruling party, or building roads and bridges. Regular military units, conscripted military personnel, and prisoners are all also engaged in similar activities - building, mining, and farming...the projects on which conscripts are deployed are not just public works for the national good. They are often sent to work on private construction projects, building houses for military leaders, and working on private farms. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have both previously documented the use of conscript labor for the benefit of ranking members of the military and the government...it is not just conscripts who are providing cheap labor for the benefit of military leaders. Prisoners are regularly employed and school children are made to work during their school holidays. The national program for school children is called Mahtot."

[29c] (pages 51-56)

- 9.22 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', published on 24 May 2012, stated that: "Those in the government national service were required to present 'movement papers' issued by their offices or departments authorizing their presence in a particular location. Those persons who did not present 'movement papers' were arrested. Participation in the national service program, which is of indefinite duration and requires conscripts to perform a wide variety of military and nonmilitary activities, is mandatory." [3b] (section 1d)

See also [Women - national service](#)

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PAYMENT FOR NATIONAL SERVICE

- 9.23 The HRW 'Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea' report, published on 16 April 2009, stated:
- "According to escaped conscripts, the normal 'allowance' during training is 50 Eritrean Nakfa per month (about US\$3). After 18 months training while on national service, this is increased to 150 Nakfa a month (\$9). This is the same amount paid to former soldiers recalled for service during the 1998-2000 war and still mobilized as well as for the over-50s who have been mobilized to serve in a reserve militia. Some of those conscripted prior to 1998 appear to have been incorporated into the regular army and receive salaries accordingly." **[29c] (p52-53)**
- 9.24 An academic paper entitled 'The Eritrean National Service: A Missed Opportunity', by Professor Gaim Kibreab, presented to a conference of Citizens for Democratic Rights in Eritrea, held in London on 11 January 2009, stated:
- "Large numbers of skilled individuals, whilst formally remaining in the army, are systematically released to work for the government and the ruling party without payment, save the pittance paid monthly. In the beginning, the agelglot [national service conscripts] received 50 Nakfa (ERN), i.e. equivalent to US \$7 per month and this was later increased to ERN 150 (US \$10). This was again increased to N 450 (US \$22) in the mid-2002 but the value of the Eritrean currency, ERN, had by then depreciated and inflation skyrocketed so much that the increase of the allowance did not make any difference to the situation of the conscripts. With the exception of the tegadelti (ex-fighters), nearly all Eritreans working for the government and the ruling party who are between the ages of 18 and 51 have been receiving no salaries or wages since 1998, save some professionals who were issued 'demobilisation ID cards' without being demobilised who were subsequently given civilian assignment while remaining under the auspices of the NS [national service] and the WYDC [Warsay Yikealo Development Campaign]. For example, most teachers, engineers, bankers, clerks, architects, electricians, mechanics, welders, nurses, dressers, bricklayers, masons, unskilled construction and agricultural labourers, etc. within the eligibility age working for the government and the ruling party receive no wages or salaries. Not only does this represent loss of indispensable income to families but also the effect of the loss of income on demand in combination with the government's hostile policy on private enterprise have wiped out Eritrea's entrepreneurial culture." **[66]**
- 9.25 Regarding individuals in national service work programmes, the GIGA 2010 paper stated that: "They receive a 'salary' of approximately 500 nakfa per month (approximately €25) and live under military discipline even when working on civil activities. Some educated persons are allowed to perform their national service in the offices of the administration, but they still do not receive payment. Thus, it is the government, the PFDJ, the mass organizations, and the senior army officers that are the beneficiaries of the campaign." **[67]**
- 9.26 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea' stated that: "The government sets wages for union workers, employees of PFDJ-owned enterprises, and government employees...civil service employees and national service recruits were paid according to a fixed scale, the most common salary being 500 nakfa (\$33) per month." **[3b] (section 7d)**

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PENALTIES FOR EVADING NATIONAL SERVICE

Legal penalties

- 9.27 Article 37 (Penalties) of the National Service Proclamation 82/1995 lists a range of sanctions which exist for evading national service, and is sub-divided into four sections. Art 37(1) states that any violation of the Proclamation is punishable by two years imprisonment or a fine, or both. Art 37(2) states that avoidance of national service by deceit or self-inflicted injury is punishable by up to two years imprisonment or a fine, followed by national service. If the self-inflicted injury precludes national service, the prison term is three years. Art 37(3) states that individuals who travel abroad to avoid national service and return before they are 40 years of age must undertake national service. The penalty for individuals who return after the age of 40, but are under 50, is imprisonment for five years; and they also lose the right to employment, to own a business licence, to be issued with an exit visa, and to own land. Art 37(4) states that the punishment for deliberately delaying being registered for national service or avoiding national service by deceit or the use of obstructive methods is two years imprisonment or a fine, or both. **[13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)**
- 9.28 The Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights report, 'The Lasting Struggle for Freedom in Eritrea - Human Rights and Political Development, 1991-2009' (Oslo Centre 2009 report), published on 22 October 2009, stated:
- "The legal penalty for evading conscription or assisting in it is two years' imprisonment (as per the National Service Regulations of 1995). Amnesty International reports, however, that in practice offenders are being punished by their local commanding officers without any form of trial, legal recourse or opportunity to appeal or redress. The forms of punishment may vary, but usually consist of torture and arbitrary detention for an indefinite period." **[19] (p94)**
- 9.29 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 'Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-seekers from Eritrea', published 20 April 2011, stated that:
- "In addition to the penalties imposed under the Proclamation on National Service, the penalties stipulated in the Eritrean Transitional Penal Code also cover military violations, including failure to enlist, or re-enlist, seeking fraudulent exemptions, desertion, absence without leave, refusal to perform military service and infliction of unfitness (injury to avoid service). The punishment ranges from six months' to 10 years' imprisonment depending on the gravity of the act. During emergencies or mobilizations, the penalties are significantly more severe. Desertion is the most severely sanctioned and entails imprisonment for up to five years. In times of mobilization or emergency this can increase from five years to life, or, in the gravest cases, the death penalty, for desertion from a unit, post or military duties or for failure to return to them after an authorized period of absence.
- "In practice, punishment for military offences is carried out extrajudicially, and has been reported to include 'shoot to kill' orders, detention for long periods often in inhumane conditions, torture and forced labour. Draft evaders/deserters are reported to be frequently subjected to torture, while conscientious objectors can face severe physical punishment as a means of forcing them to perform military service. Furthermore,

extrajudicial executions are allegedly ordered by local commanders and carried out in front of military units for what are considered serious military offences.” **[32b] (p11)**

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Punishment of relatives of national service evaders

9.30 The Oslo Centre 2009 report stated:

“Since 2005, thousands of mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, of draft evaders and escapees have been arrested throughout Eritrea. For instance, reportedly around 179 women and 26 men were detained on 24 October 2005 in the highland town of Dekemhare. The targets were parents whose children had fled the country over the last several years. If a parent was not found, the eldest available brother or the closest adult relative was detained. This wave of arrests followed earlier clamp-downs in the region. Furthermore, over 500 relatives, mostly parents, of young men and women who have avoided conscription or deserted the army, were reportedly arrested and held under harsh conditions in Asmara in late 2006. As the flight of Eritrea’s young men and women today has reached about 2000 per month, the regime has reportedly ceased the practice of arresting parents or relatives of the escapees, as this would have implicated an unmanageably large share of the population of the country.” **[19] (p93)**

9.31 The HRW ‘Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea’ report, published on 16 April 2009, stated:

“There are strict penalties for those who try and escape national service as well as for any Eritreans who leave the country without government authorization. Families are collectively punished if their relatives flee national service, usually by being jailed or forced to pay fines...all of the deserters interviewed by Human Rights Watch were fearful for the safety of their families and anxious that they would face the crippling 50,000 Nakfa fines, detention, or some other retribution such as the denial of business permits or the forfeiting of land in lieu of a cash fine. Three former conscripts said their mothers had been imprisoned for four months, two months, and two weeks respectively because they could not afford to pay the 50,000 Nakfa fine.” **[29c] (p45-46)**

9.32 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’ stated that:

“The government deployed military and police personnel throughout the country [in 2011], using roadblocks, street sweeps, and house-to-house searches to find deserters and draft evaders. Security forces continued to detain and arrest parents and other family members of individuals who evaded national service or fled the country. There were reports that such parents were either fined 50,000 nakfa (\$3,333) or forced to surrender their children to the government. Government officials entered households and confiscated property and livestock of draft evaders.” **[3b] (section 1f)**

See [Human rights violations by the security forces](#).

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ROUND-UPS (‘GIFFAS’)

- 9.33 The HRW 'Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea' report, published on 16 April 2009, noted that:

"Conscription is generally managed by local councils, the smallest units of local administration, sometimes referred to as kebele, sometimes as memehidar, a general word meaning 'administration'. These council officials maintain detailed records on the individual families in their area and ensure that those of age are conscripted. But in larger towns, the police or military also try to capture evaders or deserters through ad hoc round-ups. Round-ups of the population in towns and villages - known as giffa in Tigrinya - are common and constitute a kind of modern press-ganging. Anyone of age found without the relevant documents exempting them from national service is taken to the military camps of Sawa and Wi'a for training...even aside from evaders and deserters, any civilian who forgets their identification or travel documents is at particular risk of being rounded up in a giffa and arbitrarily detained." **[29c] (pages 48-49)**

- 9.34 The British Embassy in Asmara, in a letter dated 11 October 2010 (Annex G), provided the following information, obtained from Eritrean sources:

"Occasionally, the local authorities [Kebelles] issue letters to those who have not entered into the military urging them to do so. Round-ups are normally carried out by the military...the most common form of assistance is through informing the military of any individuals who have not undertaken military training. They usually get this information through 'informants'. The Kebelles distribute call-up papers to those found in breach of the rules on military training."

- 9.35 The British Embassy in Asmara, in a letter dated 1 April 2010 (Annex E), provided the following information, obtained from Eritrean sources:

"It is important to note that there are no set government policies or standard procedures regarding how round-ups are organised. Military service round-ups take place usually around 4 to 5 times a year but can occur more frequently or less frequently, and usually coincide with public holidays when large numbers of people are out and about. They can occur in various parts of Eritrea and are not confined to one particular part of it. Once rounded up, people are sent from Asmara to the Adi Abeto camp for processing and onward assignment."

- 9.36 The same source (Annex E) explained that conscripts are taken to the Adi Abeto camp after being rounded up, according to information obtained from Eritrean sources. Information in the HRW 'Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea' report, published on 16 April 2009, **[29c] (p48-49)**, and an Awate report, 'Eritrean regime rounds up thousands of Keren youth', dated 12 March 2007, indicated that conscripts had been taken to other military camps. **[27c]**

- 9.37 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea' stated that there were reports of round-ups during 2011:

"There were reports [in 2011] of mass arrests known as round-ups, in which citizens were held without charge indefinitely while authorities sorted out their military service paperwork in search of deserters and questioned them about their religious affiliation. These round-ups tended to coincide with the observance of Independence Day and also harvest season, when many of those detained were forced to pick vegetables for several months for no pay on government-controlled farms." **[3b] (section 1f)**

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AUTHORISED LEAVE

- 9.38 The British Embassy in Asmara, in a letter dated 1 April 2010 (Annex E), provided the following information, obtained from Eritrean sources:

“There are no standard rules with regard to leave. Individuals have no entitlement to leave, and cannot request it, but can be given it arbitrarily by local commanding officers. If a military commander authorises leave for an individual, documents are issued specifying where that person may travel to and for how long (usually one month maximum). We do not know whether leave papers are issued in a printed standard format or are handwritten.”

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

- 9.39 The War Resisters' International 'World survey of conscription and conscientious objection to military service' (Eritrea section, June 2009 update), stated that “the right to conscientious objection is not recognised”, and that conscientious objectors are “detained - often indefinitely - without trial.” [64]. The HRW 'Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea' report, published on 16 April 2009, stated that the “National Service Proclamation of 1995 makes no provision for conscientious objection to military service.” [29c] (p47)
- 9.40 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 'Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-seekers from Eritrea', published on 20 April 2011, stated that: “No alternative or substitute service is available to those objecting for reasons of conscience, including members of the Jehovah's Witness movement who cannot, in accordance with their faith, carry arms. Those who object can face extreme physical punishment as a means of forcing them to perform military service.” [32b] (p17)

See also [Jehovah's Witnesses](#).

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STUDENTS AND CONSCRIPTION

- 9.41 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', published on 24 May 2012, stated that:

“The government requires all students (except girls already married, who were generally exempt) who reached the final year of secondary school to attend grade 12 at the Sawa military and educational camp in the western section of the country. Students who did not attend this final year did not graduate and could not take examinations that determined eligibility for advanced education. Many students repeated grades, dropped out of school after the 11th grade, or attempted to leave the country to avoid being forced to go to the camp. In addition, some female students married to avoid being forced to attend the camp. Women could earn an alternative secondary school certificate by attending night school after completing national service. There were reports that students whose parents were liberation fighters were favored over others in

assignment of living accommodations, shorter terms of national service, more frequent approvals for temporary leave from military training, and greater opportunities for study.”
[3b] (section 6)

- 9.42 The HRW ‘Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea’ report, published on 16 April 2009, stated:

“The preferred method of the Eritrean government is to conscript students into national service straight from school, unless they are continuing higher education. To this end, the final year of secondary school was moved to Sawa military camp in 2003. This 12th grade takes place only in Sawa, under military authority, and incorporating military training. Although many 12th grade students are 18 years old, or less, some are older because they take longer to finish high school. Each round or intake of students incorporates 8,000 to 9,000 students.

“Once they are in the camp, however, military service effectively starts then and there. A teacher whose national service involved teaching in Sawa told Human Rights Watch, ‘The students could not study. They were always being forced to leave the class for some kind of military service.’ A former student said he did not even enter 12th grade but was ordered straight into national service in July 2007 even though he was less than 18 years old.” **[29c] (p50)**

- 9.43 The military authorities have made it difficult for students to escape from Sawa or to avoid military training, as noted in the HRW ‘Service for Life’ report:

“National service is deeply unpopular, especially because new recruits know that there is no prospect of it ending. Students have started escaping from Sawa camp during their 12th grade year without completing school. Escape is no mean feat, because, as described above, Sawa is in effect a huge prison. Those who made it described braving machine gun fire, barbed wire fences, and several days of walking through the desert without food and water.

“Some students, aware of their fate once they reach 12th grade have begun to deliberately fail classes so that they can remain in the lower grades. Government awareness of this practice has been to simply pull anyone of military age - 18 and above - out of school altogether, even though it is normal for some students to take extra years to finish school because they are poor or work on family farms...Wi’a is reportedly the camp where the ‘not so clever’ students go. If it appears that a student will not graduate [from] high school anyway, then the government will send him to Wi’a even before he has finished. One former student who was sent to Sawa explained, ‘In school, if you are absent more than two weeks, you get sent to Wi’a - for whatever reason. Sawa is supposed to be for educated people. If you get kicked out of school, you are not fit for education anyway, so you go to Wi’a.’” **[29c] (pages 50-51)**

See [Children - Child labour](#); [Children - Military service](#).

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EXEMPTIONS

- 9.44 The British Embassy in Asmara, in a letter dated 11 October 2010 (Annex G), obtained the following information from Eritrean sources about exemptions:

“Normally, married women or women with young children are exempt from military service as are those registered disabled. The elderly have usually completed their national service, but if conflict ensues they could be expected to take up arms. Military commanders are able to authorise medical exemptions, with a report from a military medical officer. There are no exemptions for those from a poor background or those who have family members dependent on them through age or illness.”

Exemption of women

- 9.45 The British Embassy in Asmara, in a letter dated 1 April 2010 (Annex E), provided the following information, obtained from Eritrean sources:

“People who are disabled or medically unfit for military/national service, and pregnant women can and have been exempted from military/national service...Married women and women with children are exempt from military/national service. Single women who become formally engaged are also exempt. Muslims and Christians are treated the same (they are given no special allowances for prayers, etc) although it is believed that Muslim women in rural areas are rarely called up. This may be due to early marriages and the fact that those communities are made up of mostly poor, subsistence-farming families.”

- 9.46 The British Embassy in Asmara, in a letter dated 3 October 2011 (Annex H), provided the following information, obtained from Eritrean sources:

“Women are able to marry whilst on a national service work programme, but not during military service, which normally is the first six months of the national service programme

“Following her marriage, a woman may apply for demobilisation, a decision on whether to grant lies with the relevant dept/ministry. It is not standard practice for a woman to be demobilised on marriage, some are expected to continue their national service for various reasons.”

- 9.47 The British Embassy letter, dated 3 October 2011 (Annex H), also stated that: “Women are not automatically exempt on marriage. They have to formally apply for demobilisation, if on national service, or exemption if national service has not yet started.” Women who are discharged from national service duties are “...issued with a certificate releasing them from duty, followed by a demobilisation card.”

See also [Women - national service](#).

Exemption on medical grounds

- 9.48 Article 13(1) of the Proclamation on National Service states that individuals who are deemed to be medically unfit for military service may be given non-military duties as an alternative to military service for a period of eighteen months. This will depend on the nature of the illness or disability of the individual concerned. For some individuals, this will not be possible, and they will be exempt from all types of national service. Article 15 of the Proclamation allows individuals who are disabled, blind or psychologically deranged to be exempt from national service altogether - whether this is military service or some other type of national service. **[13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)**

- 9.49 The British Embassy in Asmara, in a letter dated 1 April 2010 (Annex E), provided the following information, obtained from Eritrean sources:
- “People who are disabled or medically unfit for military/national service, and pregnant women can and have been exempted from military/national service. To be exempted, these individuals have to be medically certified by a doctor at a military base as disabled/medically unfit...doctors produce the medical reports needed and then make a recommendation as to whether a particular individual should be exempted from military/national service. The military authorities make the decision regarding exemption and issue the relevant exemption documents.”
- 9.50 The Human Rights Watch ‘Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea’ report, published in April 2009, stated:
- “‘Psychological derangement’ (article 14, 5.1[of the National Service Proclamation]) is also a ground for exemption from military service, and this appears to be a popular way to try and evade service. Recruits who have recently been in Sawa describe a dramatic increase in the number of people in the camp showing signs of severe mental illness. Recruits describe a new disease that has sprung up among young women drafted into Sawa and Wi’a training camps, called ‘lewt’ and only known in the camps.” [29c] (p48)

Exemption of religious clerics

- 9.51 Full-time religious clerics are not automatically exempt from national service, as noted in the International Christian Concern report, ‘The Dismantling of the Eritrean Orthodox Church’, dated 23 April 2008:
- “The Eritrean officials are forcefully sending ministers of the Eritrean Orthodox Church to military training camps. As a consequence, Eritrean Orthodox churches throughout the country are losing their leaders.
- “At the end of 2006, the Eritrean government informed churches of its decision to rescind a long-standing exemption of clerics from compulsory military service. The Roman Catholic Church in Eritrea was the only church to express vehement and public opposition to this unprecedented action. In contrast, the top leaders of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, who have been hand-picked by the government, embraced the new policy with open arms.
- “Eritrean officials are now forcibly recruiting church ministers into military service on a wide scale. On March 24, 2008, Eritrean officials issued replacement identity cards to a limited number of the church’s priests and deacons, exempting them from military training. The vast majority of the church’s leaders, however, who did not receive updated identity cards, are now required to go to military training camps.
- “The largest Eritrean Orthodox Church in the country, St. Mary, in the capital city, Asmara, had 96 ministers, but only 10 of them were issued IDs that exempted them from military training. Similarly, in rural areas, where most Orthodox churches are located, the maximum number of priests and deacons allowed to serve in any church is 10. The rest are expected to report for military service if they are under the age of 50.” [30]

- 9.52 A letter from the British Embassy in Asmara, dated 1 April 2010 (Annex E), containing information obtained from Eritrean sources, stated that: “Full-time religious clerics/nuns can be required to do military/national service although in previous years they have been exempt. It is believed that some churches or mosques are limited to having a minimum of serving religious members who are exempt from military/national service.”

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DETENTION OF NATIONAL SERVICE CONSCRIPTS

- 9.53 The Human Rights Watch ‘Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea’ report, published on 16 April 2009, stated:

“Deserting from the army or even expressing dissent over the indefinite military service is viewed as a political issue by the government. Therefore, most prisoners held for political reasons are detained without charge or trial for refusing or questioning national service or for offences punishable under military law. Even where detainees may have committed a potential crime under military law, numerous former detainees told Human Rights Watch that there was no system of military justice, that they were simply imprisoned on the orders of their commanders without any courts-martial or other procedure.

“Human Rights Watch spoke to over 40 deserters from the national service and the military who had fled the country, all of whom had been thrown in jail multiple times without due process. Their alleged offences ranged from questioning the educational curriculum to being caught in prayer meetings to being suspected of trying to leave national service.

“An officer in charge of a military prison who subsequently fled to Djibouti explained that sentencing was completely arbitrary and commanders decide how long people remain in jail...detention of conscripts who try to practice unregistered religions is common. Several people who escaped from their military service told Human Rights Watch that they were arbitrarily thrown in jail for secretly reading the Bible in Sawa camp or being caught in prayer meetings.” **[29c] (pages 27-29)**

- 9.54 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’ stated that:

“Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening [in 2011]...detention center conditions for persons temporarily held for evading military service were also harsh and life threatening. During the year [2011] there were hundreds of such detainees. Draft evaders were reportedly sent to the W’ia military camp where, typically, they were beaten. Some were held for as long as two years before being reassigned to their units. At one detention facility outside Asmara, authorities continued to hold detainees in an underground hall with no access to light or ventilation and sometimes in very crowded conditions.” **[3b] (section 1c)**

See also [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#); [Arrest and detention - legal rights](#).

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DEMOBILISATION

- 9.55 The Proclamation on National Service allows for demobilisation. The relevant article of the Proclamation is Article 20, which states that except for cases provided for in Article 21(1), citizens who have completed Active National Service are allowed to be discharged from duty. Also, citizens on Active National Service may be discharged before the end of the term of their Active National Service. The Ministry of Defence has the responsibility to issue citizens discharged from Active National Service with relevant certification. **[13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)**

Weblink to the National Service Proclamation:

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,LEGAL,,LEGISLATION,ERI,,3dd8d3af4,0.html>

- 9.56 The United States State Department 'Background Note on Eritrea', updated on 20 January 2012, provided detailed information about the demobilization programme:

"In 1993, Eritrea embarked on a phased program to demobilize 50%-60% of the army, which had by then shrunk to about 95,000. During the first phase of demobilization in 1993, some 26,000 soldiers - most of who enlisted after 1990 - were demobilized. The second phase of demobilization, which occurred the following year, demobilized more than 17,000 soldiers who had joined the EPLF before 1990 and in many cases had seen considerable combat experience. Many of these fighters had spent their entire adult lives in the EPLF and lacked the social, personal, and vocational skills to become competitive in the work place. As a result, they received higher compensation, more intensive training, and more psychological counseling than the first group. Special attention was given to women fighters, who made up some 30% of the EPLF's combat troops. By 1998, the army had shrunk to 47,000.

"The moves to demobilize were abruptly reversed after the outbreak of the 1998-2000 war with Ethiopia over the contested border. During the war, which is estimated to have resulted in well over 100,000 casualties on the two sides, Eritrea's armed forces expanded to close to 300,000 members, almost 10% of the population. This imposed a huge economic burden on the country. The war ended with a cessation of hostilities agreement in June 2000, followed by a peace agreement signed in December of the same year. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that the economy shrank by more than 8% in 2000, although it rebounded somewhat in 2001.

"The government has been slow to demobilize its military after the end of the conflict, although it formulated an ambitious demobilization plan with the participation of the World Bank. A pilot demobilization program involving 5,000 soldiers began in November 2001 and was to be followed immediately thereafter by a first phase in which some 65,000 soldiers would be demobilized. This was delayed repeatedly. In 2003, the government began to demobilize some of those slated for the first phase; however, the government maintains a 'national service' program, which includes most of the male population between 18-40 and the female population between 18-27." **[3a]**

- 9.57 The Awate report, 'Colonels and Teachers: The Ravages of Militarized Education in Eritrea', dated 14 March 2010, stated that demobilisation does not exempt individuals from national service altogether:

"A plan to demobilize 200,000 soldiers, about two-thirds of the wartime army, started only tentatively and soon stalled...instead, the government in May 2002 announced a virtual extension of the open-ended national service system by announcing a new mobilization drive termed the 'Warsai-Yikealo development campaign' (WYDC)...even

those formally demobilized, provided they are still physically fit, remain members of the National Reserve Army and are frequently called up for military refresher courses or even renewed active military service or duty in the militarized work service.” [27e]

- 9.58 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’ stated that: “With few exceptions the government requires all men and women upon graduation from high school to participate in the national service program until demobilization, which includes military training and civilian work programs. However, the criteria for demobilization were unclear, and many were required to work indefinitely in any location or capacity chosen by the government.” [3b] (section 7b)

See also [Armed forces](#).

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10. JUDICIARY

ORGANISATION

- 10.01 The ‘Lasting Struggle for Freedom in Eritrea’ report, published by the Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights in October 2009, provided the following information about the organisation of the judiciary:

“In principle, Eritrea has three types of courts, although their separate jurisdictions may at times be blurred: civil (three levels, including community and shari’a courts), military (two levels), and the special court. Furthermore, there are indications that there exists a parallel secret system of extra-judicial sentencing of political prisoners that is not anchored in any laws or presidential decrees.

“The civil court structure in Eritrea has three levels of authority. The Community Court system was formally established in 2001 to ease the pressure on the higher courts. It has a single-judge bench system filled by elected judges who hold jurisdiction over cases relating to minor infractions of the law, involving sums of less than approximately US\$7300 (110,000 nakfa). The elected judges do not have any formal legal training, but base their decisions on traditions of customary law in the area in which they serve. It is reported, however, that magistrates versed in criminal law also hear criminal cases at the level of the community courts. All decisions made by the community courts may be appealed to provincial (zoba) courts. Most people’s only contact with the legal system is with the traditional community courts. As the higher levels of the Eritrean judiciary are wholly inept and politically corrupted, the importance of the customary law-based village courts as providers of justice is increasing.

“The Zoba court is generally the court of first instance. It has civil, criminal, and shari’a benches. All first instance cases are heard by a single-judge bench system, but the Zoba Court has a three-judge appellate bench that hears cases appealed from determinations made by the Labour Office on employer-employee relations. The shari’a bench adjudicates matters of personal status of followers of Islam only. Decisions rendered by any of the benches at the zoba court can be appealed to the appropriate benches at the High Court.

“The High Court, although primarily an appellate court, is the court of first instance for a significant proportion of cases involving murder, rape, and other serious felonies. It has

a three-judge bench system with jurisdiction in civil, criminal and commercial cases, and shari'a benches. Eritrea also has a five-judge bench that hears final appeals in lieu of a Supreme Court. Although at the same level of all other benches in the High Court, the final appeals panel functions much as a Supreme Court does and it is the bench of last resort. The president of this bench is the President of the High Court and four other judges from the other benches at the High Court. The President of the High Court functions as Chief Justice.

"Although serving the civilian community, civil courts judges include former senior military officers with no formal legal training. Judges are routinely appointed and dismissed at the will of the government; despite the constitutional requirement that such actions are supposed to be based on the recommendations of an independent Judicial Service Commission (Articles 52 and 53 of the Constitution). Such a commission has yet to be established in the country.

"The Military Court has jurisdiction over penal cases brought against members of the armed forces in addition to crimes committed by and against the members of the armed forces. The presiding judges in the Military Court are all senior military officers. The Court is structured in two levels (higher and lower); the jurisdiction of these two levels depends on the seriousness of the offences in question. Neither level, however, affords the right of appeal to the accused. The higher level of the Military Court is part of the Eritrean High Court...the Special Court was established in 1996 by President Isaias Afwerki, in the aftermath of Eritrea's first publicly known corruption scandal in the mid 1990s, involving officials in the EPLF-owned Red Sea Trading Corporation. The statute or law for the establishment of the Special Court is not available, and no published records of its procedures or cases are available, as the court generally operates in secrecy...the judges of the Special Court are predominantly senior military officers and EPLF commanders hand-picked by the President and accountable to his office only. Their recruitment to the Court is likely to be based on personal affiliations and loyalty to the President, and their proven 'toughness' in disciplining their troops. There are no formal requirements of judicial training or competence, and many of the judges have little or no legal training whatsoever. It is not known how many 'benches' operate under the Special Court.

"The Special Court is an executive-controlled separate jurisdiction, not under the authority of the President of the High Court. The Office of the Attorney-General decides which cases are to be tried by a Special Court. The Court primarily has jurisdiction over criminal cases involving capital offences, theft, embezzlement, and corruption, and other unspecified abuses by government, and party officials. The Special Courts also issues directives to other courts regarding administrative matters...individuals arrested under the Special Court are kept in detention incommunicado, usually in a secret location, and there is no time limit on pre-trial detention. After the Court has decided upon a case, the detainee is transferred to an official prison or one of the many detention camps scattered throughout Eritrea. All decisions passed by the court are final and binding, as there is no appellate court. However, reportedly, in rare instances, appeals made to the Office of the President have resulted in Special Courts rehearing certain cases." **[19] (pages 40-43)**

- 10.02 The quoted information above stated that community courts were set up in 2001 but the Shaebia report, 'Community Courts Peacefully Resolve More Than Half of Cases Presented', dated 7 November 2006, stated that:

“Since being officially established three years ago [in 2003], community courts have helped thousands of people from traveling long distances, and the magistrates elected by the people have been commended on successfully accomplishing their jobs in spite of obstacles faced.

“A community court is composed of three judges, all having the same power in voting. For documenting purposes however, at least one of the three has to be literate.

“It is to be recalled that the government launched on November 1, 2003 under Proclamation 132/2003 community courts with a two-year term of office that could formally resolve cases according to the customs and practices of the community.” [44b]

- 10.03 An academic study paper by Dr. Robert Winslow, undated, accessed on 4 February 2011, published by the San Diego State University (United States) stated:

“The judicial system has three parts: civilian, military, and special courts. The civilian court system consists of village courts, subregional courts, regional courts, and the High Court, which also serves as an appellate court...under the legal system, minor infractions are brought to village courts and subregional courts. More serious offenses are argued before regional courts, and cases involving murder, rape, and other serious felonies are heard by the High Court. All cases except those argued before the High Court are heard by a single judge; on the High Court, panels of three judges hear cases...since the population is largely rural, most citizens only have contact with the legal system through the traditional village courts. Village judges, who are appointed by a panel composed of heads of regional courts, the regional prosecutor, and the regional governor, hear civil cases. Magistrates versed in criminal law hear criminal cases. Many local issues - for example, property disputes and most petty crimes - are adjudicated by local elders according to customary law. Where both litigants are Muslims, civil cases are heard under Shari'a law. The traditional courts cannot impose sentences involving physical punishment.” [72]

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INDEPENDENCE

- 10.04 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated that: “The law and unimplemented constitution provide for an independent judiciary; however, in practice the judiciary was impotent. Judicial corruption remained a problem [in 2011]. Executive control of the judiciary continued; the Office of the President served as a clearinghouse for citizens’ petitions to the courts or acted for the courts as arbitrators or facilitators in civil matters.” [3b] (section 1e)
- 10.05 The Freedom House ‘Freedom in the World 2012’ report, published on 18 May 2012, noted that: “The judiciary, which was formed by decree in 1993, has never issued rulings significantly at variance with government positions. Constitutional due process guarantees are often ignored in cases related to state security.” [9c]. The Freedom House ‘Countries at the Crossroads 2011’ report, published on 4 November 2011, stated that:

“The Eritrean judiciary has long functioned as an arm of executive authority, and the president appoints and dismisses all judges at his own discretion. Initially divided between civilian and military courts and later complicated by the addition of special

courts, the judiciary suffers from shortages of trained personnel and inadequate funding, as well as frequent executive interference...Special courts, Eritrea's system of secret military tribunals, were created in 1996 to hear cases of corruption and other abuses by government and party officials. These courts are directly accountable to the president's office and are presided over by military officers with no formal training in the law."

[9a] (page 8)

- 10.06 The International Crisis Group report, 'Eritrea: The Siege State', published on 21 September 2010, stated:

"Eritrea can aptly be described as a prison state, without rule of law or independent judiciary and where the legal process is routinely ignored, and internal security is ever more oppressive and ubiquitous...for a brief period, some independent-minded judges attempted to assert themselves. Most famously, in July 2001 the chief justice, Teame Beyene, publicly criticised the president's interference in civil courts and establishment of the Special Court. He was promptly dismissed. The Special Court was established in 1996 by Isaias. Its original purpose was purportedly to arrest the decline in moral standards among key public figures. It has come to be used to deal with corruption, capital offences and political cases. Its judges are EPLF officials and army commanders appointed personally by the president and accountable solely to him. Its sessions are usually held in secret." **[18] (page 11)**

FAIR TRIAL

- 10.07 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', published on 24 May 2012, stated that:

"The judiciary suffered from a lack of trained personnel, inadequate funding, and poor infrastructure. Many civilian and special court judges are former senior military officers with no formal legal training. They generally based their decisions on 'conscience' without reference to the law. The drafting into national service of many civilian court administrators, defendants, judges, lawyers, and others involved in the legal system continued to have a significant negative effect on the judiciary." **[3b] (section 1e)**

See also [Constitution](#).

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11. ARREST AND DETENTION – LEGAL RIGHTS

- 11.01 Article 17 of the Eritrean constitution stated that:

"1. No person may be arrested or detained save pursuant to due process of law.

"2. No person shall be tried or convicted for any act or omission which did not constitute a criminal offence at the time when it was committed.

"3. Every person arrested or detained shall be informed of the grounds for his arrest or detention and of the rights he has in connection with his arrest or detention in a language he understands.

“4. Every person who is held in detention shall be brought before a court of law within forty-eight (48) hours of his arrest, and if this is not reasonably possible, as soon as possible thereafter, and no such person shall be held in custody beyond such period without the authority of the court.” **[83]**

- 11.02 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated that: “The law stipulates that detainees must be brought before a judge within 48 hours of arrest and may not be held more than 28 days without being charged with a crime. In practice suspects were detained for much longer periods without being brought before a judge, charged with a crime, or in some cases even understanding the reason for their detention. Authorities also often changed the charges during detention.” **[3b] (section 1d)**

See also [Detention of national service and military service conscripts](#); [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#).

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12. PRISON AND DETENTION CENTRE CONDITIONS

- 12.01 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, provided the following information about prison conditions:

“Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening [in 2011]. Severe overcrowding was common. Some prisoners were shackled in unventilated holding cells for long periods of time in extreme desert heat and died due to heat exhaustion and lack of medical care. Underground cells or shipping containers with little or no ventilation in extreme temperatures held prisoners. The shipping containers were reportedly not large enough to allow all of those incarcerated to lie down at the same time. The cement-lined underground bunkers held up to 200 prisoners each; prisoners reportedly lost consciousness from the extreme heat.

“The government did not provide adequate provisions for basic and emergency medical care in prisons and detention centres, and detainees died due to lack of medical treatment during the year [2011]. Food was not adequate. Potable water was generally not available...use of psychological torture was common, according to former inmates. One common technique was for the interrogator to open and close a cell door constantly, as if the prisoner were going to be taken for interrogation with beatings. Denial of food, medical treatment, and family access were also used to punish prisoners. Some prisoners were released after close friends or relatives offered their homes or other property as bond.” **[3b] (section 1c)**

- 12.02 The Human Rights Watch ‘2012 World Report’, published on 22 January 2012, stated that:

“Escaping Eritreans, including prison guards, report that torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment in detention are systematic and routine. Aside from severe beatings, punishments include mock drowning, hanging by the arms from trees, being tied up in the sun in contorted positions for hours or days, and being doubled up inside a tire. One investigative technique is to tighten handcuffs so that circulation to the hands is cut off and pain from the swelling hands becomes unbearable.

“Many prisoners are held in unlit underground bunkers and in shipping containers with broiling daytime and freezing nighttime temperatures. Prisoners are held in isolation or are packed tightly in severely crowded cells. Food rations generally consist of lentils and a bread roll once a day and tea twice a day. Deaths in prison from torture, disease, inadequate food, and other harsh conditions are frequent.” **[29b]**

12.03 The Amnesty International ‘2012 Annual Report’, published on 24 May 2012, stated that: “Prison conditions [in 2011] were appalling, and in many cases amounted to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Many detainees were held in underground cells or metal shipping containers, often in desert locations and therefore suffered extremes of heat and cold. Prisoners were given inadequate food and drinking water. Many prisoners were held in severely overcrowded and hygienic conditions.” **[6b]**

12.04 As regards prison visits by NGOs and relatives of prisoners, the United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’ stated:

“Prisoners and detainees did not have reasonable access to visitors and were not always permitted religious observance. Authorities commonly moved prisoners to locations far from their families to make family visits impossible. In some circumstances authorities permitted convicted criminals up to three visits per week by family members; however, this was only common for those who had relatives working within the government. Persons detained, arrested, or convicted for reasons of national security or for evading national service were denied family visits and often were held in solitary confinement...during the year [2011] the government did not permit the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to monitor prison conditions; this included denying the ICRC access to Ethiopian prisoners of war detained in the country.”

[3b] (section 1c)

See also [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#).

12.05 The Human Rights Watch ‘Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea’ report (HRW Service for Life report), published on 16 April 2009, stated:

“The total number of prisons in Eritrea is a mystery. Eritrea has a formidable network of detention facilities, some of which are well known, and others secret, some authorized, and others not...keeping track of all the detention facilities is extremely difficult because each town and administrative district in Eritrea has a jail; wherever there is a police post [there] is a cell; and each military division has its own prison. In addition, there are secret facilities about which many rumors exist, such as Eiraeiro, where members of the G15 are thought to be held...underground facilities were reported at Sawa, Track B, Mai Serwa, Haddis Ma’asker, Aderser, Alla, and Dahlak, among others. There are multiple prisons in Camp Sawa, including several underground cells.” **[29c] (p34)**

LOCATION OF PRISONS AND DETENTION CENTRES

12.06 The following is a list of places of detention in alphabetical order that have been mentioned in sources accessed. The list should not be regarded as a complete or comprehensive list of all the Eritrean detention facilities:

- Aderser. The HRW Service for Life report described it as a “military camp/training center”, and stated that it was located “25 km from Sawa camp”. **[29c] (p93)**

- Adi Abeto. The HRW Service for Life report described it as a “main prison for Asmara; also used as processing centre to send prisoners elsewhere”, and stated that it is located “10 to 15 kilometers northeast of Asmara off the road to Keren.” **[29c] (p93)**. An Awate report, “Eritrea’s food security: theory vs practice”, dated 7 April 2008, stated that: “The two story building generally functions as a holding bin, a ‘referral jail.’ Nearly five hundred prisoners are held there: those who have the resources are able to buy their freedom by paying the penalty fee, which generally ends up in the pockets of a colonel or a general.” **[27a]**
- Adi Quala or Adi Qala. The HRW Service for Life report described it as a “military prison”, and stated that it is located “40 kilometers north of Ethiopian border, off main road from Asmara through Mendefera.” **[29c] (p93)**
- Agip, Asmara. The HRW Service for Life report described it as a “police-run facility”. **[29c] (p93)**. The Reporters Without Borders report, ‘Eight state media journalists still held in police-run “Agip” centre in Asmara’, dated 30 November 2006, stated that: “Located behind the ‘Capitol’ cinema and opposite the presidential palace, this complex is ‘where the police take detainees to torture them before transferring them to their final destination,’ a former detainee told Reporters without Borders.” **[20a]**
- Alla or Ala. The HRW Service for Life report described it as an “old prison from Italian days”, and stated that it is located “40 kilometers from Asmara, near Dekemhare town” **[29c] (p93)**
- Assab Front (aka ‘Gimbar’). The HRW Service for Life report described it as a “military prison”. **[29c] (p93)**
- Baharia Naval Base. The HRW Service for Life report described it as a “military facility” located in “Massawa”. **[29c] (p94)**
- Barantu. The HRW Service for Life report described it as a “civilian prison” located in “Barantu town.” **[29c] (p94)**
- Dahlak Kebir. The HRW Service for Life report described it as a “maximum security” prison, located in the “Dahlak archipelago, islands in the Red Sea”, and stated that it contains “‘political’ prisoners, including those returned from Malta and Egypt.” **[29c] (p94)**
- Duarwa. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is located in the “south of Asmara on the road to Adi Quala before Adi Ugri” but states nothing else about it. **[29c] (p94)**
- Era Eiro (Eiraeiro). The HRW Service for Life report described it as a “secret jail, not acknowledged by the government” and is located in the “Filfil-Selomuna area north of the Asmara-Massawa road”. **[29c] (p94)**
- Gedem prison. The HRW Service for Life report described it as the “site of forced prison labor for the construction of a naval base” and stated that it is located in “Gedem, 40 kilometers south of Massawa”. **[29c] (p94)**

- Ghatelay (Ghatielay). The HRW Service for Life report described it as a “forced labor camp” set up to “build a military base”, and stated that it is located about “40 to 45 kilometers northwest of Asmara off main road to Massawa.” **[29c] (p94)**
- Hadish Maaskar. A United Nations IRIN report, ‘Eritrea: Another journalist detained’, dated 7 August 2002, stated that it is a “detention facility” and is located “near Gyrmayka, on the Sudanese border.” **[17a]**
- Halhalas. The HRW Service for Life report described it as a “sub-provincial prison”, and is “specifically for those caught trying to cross the border”, and stated that it is located “45 kilometers from Asmara”. **[29c] (p94)**
- Kambo Ndafurstale. The HRW Service for Life report described it as a “military jail”, and stated that it is located in “Sanafe town”. **[29c] (p94)**
- Klima. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is located “near Assab” but did not provide further details. **[29c] (p94)**
- Mai Daga. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is located “45 kilometers south of Asmara (near Decamhare)” but did not provide further details. **[29c] (p94)**
- Mai Srwa. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is located “outside Asmara” and is used for the detention of “political prisoners and Pentecostal pastors”, and also this facility has “shipping containers”. **[29c] (p94)**
- Mai Temenei. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is a “military prison”. **[29c] (p94)**. In May 2008, the camp was mentioned as a detention centre for Ethiopian women detained circa 21 May 2008, in a facility named as “the Enda Seal (TB Center)”. **[27g]** (Awate – ‘Eritrea’s prisoners of conscience get a voice at the UN’, 22 May 2008)
- Metkelabet. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is located “between Massawa and Asmara” and is a “military prison belonging to the 32-division.” **[29c] (p94)**
- Me’eter. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is located “between Nakfa and the coast”. **[29c] (p95)**
- Nakhura Island. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is “part of the Dahlak complex of prisons” and is a “maximum security” facility. **[29c] (p95)**
- Prima 1+2. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is a “military prison”. **[29c] (p95)**
- Sawa. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is a “military camp/training center” and is located “along Sawa River, in far western Eritrea near the border with Sudan, about 10 km south of the road midway between Sebderat and Hawashayt.” **[29c] (p95)**

- Sembel prison. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is “possibly the normal prison of Sembel town, but also mentioned as a place for political prisoners”, and also stated that it is a “Asmara suburb.” [29c] (p95)
- Tehadasso. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is a “military” detention facility, and also that it has “shipping containers”. [29c] (p95)
- Tessenei. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is a “military” detention facility and is located in “Tessenei.” [29c] (p95)
- “Tract B”. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is a “military” detention facility, located in “Asmara”, also that it was a “former US storage facility near Asmara airport.” [29c] (p95)
- Tsererat. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is a “military” detention facility, located in “Asmara”, and also that it is used “mainly for EPLF veterans” and contains “underground cells.” [29c] (p95)
- Wengel Mermera. The Asmarino report, ‘Eritrea continues to hold thousands of prisoners of faith’, dated 11 March 2010, described Wengel Mermera as a “maximum security, crime investigation unit”, located in “Asmara”. [68b]
- Wi'ya/W'ia/Wieh. The HRW Service for Life report stated that it is a “military camp/training center” and is located along the “Red Sea Coast, about 40 kilometers southeast of Massawa, off Road to Asmara”. [29c] (p95). The Awate report, ‘Scores of Eritreans die at W'ia’, dated 3 October 2007, provided details: “Wia is not a single camp. It represents a cluster of several camps, including one used exclusively as a detention center...it holds two large groups of Eritreans protesting unjust laws: military conscription escapees/evaders and members of banned churches.” [27d]

See also the Annex in the Human Rights Watch report, ‘Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea’:

http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/eritrea0409web_0.pdf.

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13. DEATH PENALTY

13.01 The Amnesty International ‘Death Sentences and Executions 2011’ report, published on 27 March 2012, classed Eritrea as one of those countries, “...which retain the death penalty for ordinary crimes such as murder but can be considered abolitionist in practice in that they have not executed anyone during the past 10 years and are believed to have a policy or established practice of not carrying out executions.” [6a]

13.02 The Amnesty International ‘Death Sentences and Executions 2011’ report also stated that:

“In Eritrea, official information on the use of the death penalty is very difficult to obtain. Thousands of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience continue to be held in arbitrary detention, some for up to 17 years. Most prisoners are not charged with a recognizable criminal offence and are not brought to trial. The government refuses to

provide information on detainees, including their health status and location. People were reported to have been killed in detention. In this context, no new executions or death sentences were reported for 2011.” **[6a]**

- 13.03 Similarly, a report submitted by the Eritrean government in November 2009 to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the purposes of a United Nations Universal Periodic Review stated:

“In Eritrea, the death penalty is applied with extreme caution. It is the mandate of the Ministry of Justice to forward the judgments where death penalty is pronounced, together with its opinions, to the President of the State of Eritrea. The President of the State of Eritrea may remit or commute the sentence. The Constitution of Eritrea guarantees against deprivation of life without due process of law. The Transitional Penal Code of Eritrea, on its part, provides that a sentence of death may not be passed except in cases where there are no extenuating circumstances. It further provides that the death penalty may not be pronounced on any person who commits an offence under the age of eighteen years or in a state of limited responsibility. In the case of a prisoner who is seriously ill, carrying out execution of the sentence is prohibited while that prisoner continues to be in that state. In the case of [a] convicted woman who is pregnant or have [sic] children less than three years of age the sentence is commuted to rigorous imprisonment for life.” **[73a]**

- 13.04 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (United Kingdom) ‘Human Rights and Democracy: The 2011 Foreign & Commonwealth Office’ report, published in April 2012, stated that: “There were no reports of the death penalty being used in 2011”, but also stated that: “The government of Eritrea operates a ‘shoot to kill’ policy along the border against those Eritreans seeking to leave the country illegally.” **[10a] (page 236)**

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14. POLITICAL AFFILIATION

FREEDOM OF POLITICAL EXPRESSION

- 14.01 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated: “The law and unimplemented constitution provide citizens with the right to change their government peacefully; however, citizens were not allowed to exercise this right in practice.” **[3b] (section 3)**
- 14.02 The ‘Freedom in the World 2012’ report, published by Freedom House on 18 May 2012, explained that:
- “A new constitution was ratified in 1997, calling for ‘conditional’ political pluralism and an elected 150-seat National Assembly, which would choose the president from among its members by a majority vote. However, this system has never been implemented, as national elections planned for 2001 have been postponed indefinitely. The Transitional National Assembly is comprised of 75 PFDJ members 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. The PFDJ and the military, both strictly subordinate to President Isaias, are in practice the only institutions of political significance in Eritrea.” **[9c] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)**

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

- 14.03 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’ stated: “The law and unimplemented constitution provide for freedom of assembly and association; however, the government did not permit either. For public gatherings, the government required those assembling to obtain a permit, although this requirement was enforced sporadically.” **[3b] (section 2b)**

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MEMBERSHIP OF THE PEOPLE’S FRONT FOR DEMOCRACY AND JUSTICE (PFDJ)

- 14.04 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’ stated:

“Membership in the PFDJ, the only legal political party, was not mandatory for all citizens; however, the government coerced membership for certain categories of individuals, particularly those occupying government positions or assigned through national service, to serve in government institutions. All citizens were forced to attend PFDJ indoctrination meetings irrespective of membership, and there were reports of threats to withhold the ration cards of those who did not attend. There were reports that similar meetings were mandatory for Eritrean communities abroad, and the names of those not attending were reported to government officials. Reportedly citizens who did not attend were harassed, and their families in Eritrea were subject to harassment. Eritrean officials overseas also collected biographical and contact information on Eritreans living abroad.” **[3b] (section 1f)**

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OPPOSITION GROUPS AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

- 14.05 The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) ‘World Factbook’ section on Eritrea, updated on 31 July 2012, lists the names of various opposition groups and the names of their leaders:

“Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP) [HAGOS, Mesfin]; Eritrean Islamic Jihad or EIJ (includes Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement or EIJM also known as the Abu Sihel Movement); Eritrean Islamic Salvation or EIS (also known as the Arafa Movement); Eritrean Liberation Front or ELF [ABDULLAH Muhammed]; Eritrean National Alliance or ENA (a coalition including EIJ, EIS, ELF, and a number of ELF factions) [HERUY Tedla Biru]; Eritrean Public Forum or EPF [ARADOM lyob].” **[1]**

- 14.06 The Asmarino report, ‘Mesfin Hagos steps down as chair of EDP’, dated 9 April 2009, stated that Mesfin Hagos resigned from his post as head of the Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP) in April 2009. The Central Council of the EDP elected Tesfamichael Yohannes to be the new head of the party. **[68c]**

- 14.07 The International Crisis Group report, ‘Eritrea: The Siege State’, published on 21 September 2010, provided an analysis of the political opposition:

“Political debate and pluralism have rarely flourished in Eritrea: briefly in the late 1940s; as part of the underground nationalist movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s; and then even more briefly in 2000-2001. The EPLF [Eritrean People’s Liberation Front] is

the product of a splinter opposition movement to the then-dominant ELF. The civil war between the ELF [Eritrean Liberation Front] and EPLF confirmed in the minds of its leadership that there was no room for debate and dissent in the vortex of violent competing nationalisms and in the face of the powerful Ethiopian enemy. Therefore, the EPLF permitted no other liberation front to operate within the country, just as it accepted no disunity within its own ranks. Once driven into Sudan in 1981 and then scattered into European and North American exile, however, the ELF spawned a range of movements that opposed the EPLF from abroad. While some fighters and factions rejoined the EPLF in the late 1980s, the rest remained firmly outside the political fold.

“There consequently has always been a broad opposition outside the country, ranging from branches of the ELF; to ethnocentric ‘liberation’ organisations (notably Kunama and Afar); to new parties fronted by former EPLF leaders and other dissidents in exile. These remain divided. Some advocate constitutional, negotiated transition and thus a degree of engagement with the EPLF; others call for renewal of armed struggle. There are also starkly different perceptions of the regime, whether as a Tigrinya dictatorship or a manifestation of Christian hegemony. Thus, there are sometimes sharp disagreements between Tigrinya highlanders in exile - especially those associated with the armed struggle - and Muslims - especially those from or purporting to represent the lowlands. There are likewise disagreements over leadership and structure.

“No legal opposition party or broad opposition movement exists - yet - in the country. Hostility to the government is manifest in silent, fearful, brooding disengagement from the state and tacit withdrawal of support from the ‘tegadelay’ [“EPLF fighter” (Tigrinyan)] generation. Yet, despite the deep disillusionment and low morale, overseas opposition parties are regarded somewhat sceptically. Ordinary citizens are not yet persuaded that any of them would significantly improve their lot. Many believe the leaders of some of these movements are cut from much the same cloth as the president and are at the least unsure of their democratic credentials...the only opposition movement of any significance which operates inside Eritrea, at least part of the time, is Eritrean Islamic Jihad (EIJ), an armed, radical Islamic front. Founded in the early 1980s, it enjoyed the support of both the Sudanese government and Osama bin Laden in the 1990s. It continues to operate covertly at a relatively low level in the western lowlands and northern mountains. Until the recent thaw in relations with Sudan, Asmara regularly accused Khartoum of providing support and bases to enable it to cross the remote border with ease. Despite the low-level of its activities, EIJ has potential to tap into the alienation of young Muslims, who are increasingly aggrieved at state interference in Muslim institutions, land alienation, the economic domination of highlanders (especially in the western lowlands), the state’s refusal to recognise Arabic as an official language, the lack of Muslim representation in the upper echelons of the political and military leadership and the recruitment of Muslim women into the army.” **[18] (pages 12-13)**

- 14.08 The Freedom House ‘Countries at the Crossroads 2011’ report, published on 4 November 2011, stated that:

“With no space in Eritrea for competing political parties, independent media, or autonomous civil society groups, and with all avenues for dissent closed, organized opposition to the PFDJ-controlled government has been visible only outside the country since 2001. The dissent that exists within Eritrea today either takes the form of passive resistance or clandestine organizing. Outside, the main opposition consists of the 12-member Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA), whose headquarters are in Ethiopia, a fact that undermines their credibility with Eritreans at home. The EDA includes a wide range

of parties and fronts, many of them small and regionally focused, which until recently have had little more in common than hatred for Isaias. In 2009 and 2010, however, they gelled into several blocs or coalitions, including one large unarmed political party - the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP), drawn from offshoots of both the PFDJ and its liberation-era rival, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) - and two armed blocs, the Eritrean Solidarity Front, built mainly around Muslim rights issues, and the Democratic Front of Eritrean Nationalities, focused on the rights of ethnic minorities. The two identity-based blocs announced a unified military command in May 2010, signalling a decision to step up armed operations, while underlining the primary cleavage in Eritrean politics – that between the highland Tigrinya-speaking Christians who make up half the population and dominate both the government and the secular EPDP and the lowland, politically-marginalized Muslims from Eritrea's eight ethnic minorities. All share a commitment to oust Isaias from power, though they differ over the degree to which they should cooperate with Ethiopia and whether to use violence against the Asmara regime.” [9a] (page 4)

See also [Political system](#); [Women - political rights](#); [Annex B Political Organisations](#).

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15. FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND MEDIA

OVERVIEW

- 15.01 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, summarised the situation regarding freedom of speech and media in Eritrea:

“The law and unimplemented constitution provide for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the government severely restricted these rights in practice...the government severely restricted the ability of individuals to criticize the government in public or in private, and some who did were arrested or detained...public criticism about the government’s inability to combat poverty and malnutrition was prohibited. The government actively monitored the Eritrean diaspora via agents.” [3b] (section 2a)

- 15.02 The International Crisis Group report, ‘Eritrea: The Siege State’, published on 21 September 2010, provided an overview of freedom of the press and media:

“Eritrea is regarded as one of the worst offenders in terms of press freedom. No independent media has been permitted since 2001...today, only state-run media operate, including the newspapers Hadas Eritrea (Tigrinya); Eritrea al-Hadisa (Arabic); the Eritrea Profile (English); the television channel EriTV; a radio station (Dimtsi Hafash, ‘voice of the masses’); and the website Shaebia.org. Other publications and news services are controlled by the government. All produce carefully-vetted material and militaristic propaganda. Journalists at the information ministry - often largely untrained national service personnel - are closely monitored, not least because they occasionally flee the country. The ministry is the voice of the state, and its head, Ali Abdu, is sometimes seen as being groomed as a possible successor to Isaias [Afewerki] There are few foreign journalists. Those who make it through the rigorous accreditation process find their movements highly restricted; when they become too critical, they are ‘frozen’ or expelled. Internet and email are closely monitored, though Eritreans frequently access opposition websites.

“The 1996 Press Law was supposed to guarantee a free media, but it also made clear that no outlet should produce material which promoted dissension and division or might ‘disturb the peace’. The government can intervene at any time to prevent the dissemination of ‘undesirable’ material.” **[18] (p16)**

15.03 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’ stated:

“The private press remained banned. The government controlled all media, which included one newspaper that was published in three languages, three radio stations, and a television station. The law requires journalists to be licensed. The law does not allow private ownership of broadcast or other media. Satellite dishes were widespread in Asmara and allowed by the government. Throughout the year [2011] the government ordered restaurants and hotels to shut off television satellite feeds of international news organizations when stories were shown that they believed could incite unrest, particularly those relating to events in North Africa and the Middle East. The minority who could afford to purchase satellite dishes had access to uncensored international news.

“The law restricts printing and publication of materials. The printing of a publication that does not have a permit and the printing or dissemination of prohibited foreign publications are both punishable by imprisonment. Government approval is required for distribution of publications from religious or international organizations.”

[3b] (section 2a)

15.04 The Reporters Without Borders report, ‘Predators of Press Freedom’, published on 4 May 2012, stated:

“Basic freedoms were officially ‘suspended’ more than 10 years ago, after ruling party dissidents started pressing for more democracy. Any hint of opposition is seen as a threat to ‘national security.’ The privately-owned media no longer exist. There are just state media whose content is worthy of the Soviet era.

“Ruled with an iron hand by a small ultra-nationalist clique centred on Afeworki, this Red Sea country has been transformed in just a few years into a vast open prison, Africa’s biggest jail for the media. Around 30 journalists are currently being held in prisons, undergrounds cells or metal containers.

“Four of them have died as a result of the extremely cruel conditions or committed suicide. Others have just disappeared. And others flee the country illegally, at risk to their lives.” **[20b]**

MEDIA ORGANISATIONS

15.05 The media section of the BBC ‘Eritrea Country Profile - Media’, updated on 22 February 2012, lists the state press agencies as: Hadas Eritrea (published three days a week); Eritrea Profile (government-owned English language weekly paper); Tirigta (pro-government youth weekly) and Geled (youth weekly); Eri-TV (state television); Voice of the Broad Masses of Eritrea (Dimtsi Hafash) (state-run radio networks); Radio Zara (state-run FM network); and Erina (Eritrean state news agency). **[25c]**. The website for the Eritrean Ministry of Information (Shabait), accessed on 23 May 2012, under the index found on the homepage, listed several titles under the heading of local

newspapers. These were Eritrea Profile, Eritrea Alhaditha, Haddas Ertra and Eritrea Haddas. [46a]

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INTERNET

15.06 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', stated:

"There were government restrictions on access to the Internet, and the government monitored Internet communications.

"The government monitored e-mail without obtaining warrants as required by law. All Internet service users were required to use one of the three Internet service providers owned directly by the government or controlled through high-ranking PFDJ party members. While Internet cafes with extremely limited bandwidth were available in Asmara and other major cities, the vast majority of persons in the country did not have access to the Internet. Those who wanted a larger bandwidth, such as some international mining corporations, paid exorbitant prices far beyond the reach of the local population. In rural areas of the country, there was no access to the Internet. Government informants frequented Internet cafes, where they visually monitored customers' screens and occasionally demanded customers' records. The government also discouraged citizens from viewing Web sites [sic] known to be antigovernment by continuously labeling the sites and their developers as saboteurs of the government. Many citizens expressed fear of arrest if the government caught them viewing such sites." [3b] (section 2a)

15.07 The Reporters Without Borders 'Enemies of the Internet Report 2012', published on 13 March 2012, about government restrictions on the use of the Internet stated that:

"In this totally freedom-deprived country whose privately owned media were shut down in September 2001, the Internet remains the only space left where Eritreans are free to voice their opinions. Its use, however, is still very limited. Dictator Isaias Afewerki has imposed a climate of terror that has led the few Eritreans brave enough to connect despite technical obstacles and surveillance in the cybercafés to rely on self-censorship.

"Leading diaspora websites such as Assenna.com, Asmarino.com and Awate.com are inaccessible mainly because of the slow bandwidth speed. No independent site is currently operated from Eritrea. Those living abroad who post writings on 'banned' websites often have to do so anonymously as a security measure...Eritrean Information Minister Ali Abdu, and Yemane Gebreab, are coordinating online propaganda, disinformation initiatives on the Internet, cyberattacks against opposition sites, and crackdowns and pressure on the regime's opponents. They have decided to occupy the social networks' terrain and to confront their opponents there by disseminating their own pro-regime messages. One of the Facebook pages concerned is Eritrea First, which, as of early March 2012, boasts 2,500 friends and whose motto is 'The nation always comes first.'

"An unprecedented wave of cyberattacks struck several websites critical of the regime in early December 2011. Most of the opposition sites, including Assenna.com, Awate.com, Asmarino.com, were blocked for several days. Hackers allegedly attacked these sites' databases in a vain attempt to delete their archives, but pro-government

sites such as Meskerem.net, Alenalki.com, and Dehai.org were spared – a new censorship episode with which it would be difficult not to connect the Asmaran regime.”
[20c]

- 15.08 The Freedom House ‘Countries at the Crossroads 2011’ report, published on 4 November 2011, stated that:

“Eritrea gained access to the Internet in 2000. There are four operational local service-providers, and all are required to rent bandwidth from the state-owned EriTel, which occasionally shuts off access to the Internet when state officials order it to do so. State-owned print and broadcast media are posted online on the Ministry of Information’s website, shabait.com. The most widely read alternative sources of information are oppositional and independent websites, such as awate.com, asmarino.com and assena.com, which produce original reporting and commentary, in addition to providing extensive links to other sources of information. These sites have come under frequent distributed denial of service (DDOS) attacks that they ascribe to the government and its supporters. The government restricts online access for public sector employees to terminals monitored by their supervisors, but efforts to limit or monitor access by private users have so far been unsuccessful, as enterprising Eritreans, like their counterparts around the world, have easily found ways to get around such restrictions through remote-access servers and other means.” **[9a] (page 6)**

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JOURNALISTS

- 15.09 The Committee to Protect Journalists ‘2011 Prison Census’ report, published on 8 December 2011, provided information about the journalists who had been arrested in 2001:

“More than 10 years after imprisoning leading editors of Eritrea’s once-vibrant independent press and permanently banning their publications to silence growing criticism of President Isaias Afewerki, Eritrean authorities had yet to account for the whereabouts, health, or legal status of the journalists, some of whom may have died in secret detention.

“The journalists were arrested without charge after the government suddenly announced on September 18, 2001, that it was closing the country’s independent newspapers. The papers had reported on divisions within the ruling Party for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) and advocated for full implementation of the country’s constitution. A dozen top officials and PFDJ reformers, whose pro-democracy statements had been covered by the independent newspapers, were also arrested.

“Authorities initially held the journalists at a police station in the capital, Asmara, where they began a hunger strike on March 31, 2002, and smuggled a message out of jail demanding due process. The government responded by transferring them to secret locations without ever bringing them before a court or publicly registering charges.

“Over the years, Eritrean officials have offered vague and inconsistent explanations for the arrests - from nebulous antistate conspiracies involving foreign intelligence to accusations of skirting military service or violating press regulations. Officials at times

have even denied that the journalists existed. Meanwhile, shreds of often unverifiable, second- or third-hand information smuggled out of the country by people fleeing into exile have suggested the deaths of as many as five journalists in custody.” [76a]

- 15.10 The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) ‘Attacks on the Press in 2011’ report, published on 21 February 2012, stated that:

“No independent press has operated in this Red Sea nation since a September 2001 government crackdown on dissent that led to the imprisonment of 11 leading journalists without charge or trial and the enforced closure of their publications. President Isaias Afewerki's administration consistently refused to account for the whereabouts, legal status, or health of the jailed journalists, or even confirm reports that some had died in custody. All of the journalists were held without access to their families or lawyers. The only media allowed to operate in the country were under the control of Information Minister Ali Abdu, who enforced rigid control of information and ideas through intimidation and imprisonment. Even state media journalists braved border guards' shoot-to-kill orders to escape the country. Government agents abroad harassed and intimidated media outlets established by exiled journalists. The government's egregious actions drew condemnation from the European Parliament in September 2011, the latest in a series of international censures.” [76b]

- 15.11 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, stated:

“Most independent journalists remained in detention. According to Reporters Without Borders, the government continued to detain more than 30 journalists during the year [2011]. The government did not provide information about their places of detention or health, rendering these cases of forced disappearance. Between June 1, 2010, and May 31 [2011], six journalists reportedly fled the country.

“During the year [2011] authorities arrested at least four journalists. In February [2011] authorities arrested radio journalists Nebiel Edris, Ahmed Usman, and Mohamed Osman. In March [2011] the government arrested sports journalist Tesfalidet Mebrahtu, who worked with state-owned radio and television.

“No new information was available regarding the disappearance of Dawit Isaac, founder of the now-closed weekly newspaper Setit. Isaac's brother and others reportedly submitted a writ of habeas corpus to the court requesting details on his location and a review of his detention.

“Censorship or Content Restrictions: Most independent journalists remained in detention or had fled the country, which effectively prevented any media criticism of the government. All other journalists practiced self-censorship due to fear of government reprisal. Journalists are required to obtain written permission to take photographs. The one foreign news organization operating had only one heavily censored stringer, who did not permanently reside in the country.” [3b] (section 2a)

- 15.12 The Committee to Protect Journalists ‘10 Most Censored Countries’ report, published on 2 May 2012, stated:

“Journalists are conscripted into their work and enjoy no editorial freedom; they are handed instructions on how to cover events. Journalists suspected of sending information outside the country are thrown into prison without charge or trial and held for extended periods of time without access to family or a lawyer. The government expelled the last accredited foreign correspondent in 2007. All Internet service providers are

required to connect to the World Wide Web through government-operated EriTel. While Eritrea's journalists in exile run many websites, Internet access is affordable for only a handful of citizens, and mobile Internet isn't available." [76c]

For further information on the treatment of prisoners, see [Prison and detention centre conditions](#).

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16. HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS, ORGANISATIONS AND ACTIVISTS

- 16.01 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', published on 24 May 2012, stated:

"The government forced the closure of all remaining international NGO offices during the year [2011] (Oxfam, Lutheran World Federation, Irish Self-Help, Gruppo Missione Asmara of Italy, Refuge Trust International, and Norwegian Church Aid), and seized NGO property that it claimed belonged to the government. These NGOs filled gaps in essential services that the government did not provide, such as adequate access to food and water. Prior to the closure, the government sometimes prevented NGO travel by restricting fuel supplies and failing to respond to requests for travel permits.

"Civil society organizations were few in number, lacked capacity, and were controlled by the government or fearful of government reprisal...the government severely restricted UN operations in the country. The government did not permit the World Food Program, which maintained an office in the country, to conduct humanitarian food distribution, although it allowed UNICEF to continue its supplemental feeding programs under the supervision of the Ministry of Health." [3b] (section 5)

- 16.02 The International Crisis Group report, 'Eritrea: The Siege State', published on 21 September 2010, stated:

"Independent civil society does not exist in any meaningful way. The [People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ)] party dominates what passes for the nongovernmental sector. It runs national unions for youths and students, women and workers, much as during the armed struggle branches of the EPLF were responsible for socio-economic entities that were to participate in the 'social revolution'. No independent civil society groups, trade unions or NGOs are permitted; strikes are not allowed under any circumstances; and advocacy or lobby groups cannot be organised outside PFDJ structures. Leaders of the party unions are carefully vetted. Religious organisations, both Christian and Muslim, are closely monitored. Their leaders are cowed and take no public stance on policy or any other social issue. The last time a senior non-government figure was publicly outspoken was in 2005, when the deeply revered Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church criticised state interference in the church's affairs. He was stripped of his authority and has been under house arrest ever since." [18] (p16)

- 16.03 The 'Freedom in the World 2012' report, published by Freedom House on 18 May 2012, stated that:

"The government maintains a hostile attitude toward civil society, and independent NGOs are not tolerated. 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. International human rights NGOs are barred and only six international humanitarian NGOs are present in the country. In September 2011, Eritrea accused Amnesty International of infiltrating the country to try to foment a North African-style revolution. Amnesty denied the claims, saying that it has been refused access to Eritrea for more than a decade by the government.” **[9c] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)**

- 16.04 The Freedom House ‘Countries at the Crossroads 2011’ report, published on 4 November 2011, stated that:

“Eritrea has not permitted the formation of autonomous civil society groups, think tanks, policy organizations, or other NGOs since the mid-1990s. The only indigenous NGO not directly under the control of the PFDJ is Citizens for Peace in Eritrea, which focuses solely on the conflict with Ethiopia. With two exceptions – Planned Parenthood and the Red Cross Society – international groups are not permitted to establish local chapters, and global human rights organizations are blocked from visiting and carving out investigations. In 2005, the government decreed that international aid agencies should pay taxes on all goods imported into the country, including food and medicine, and expatriate employees should pay income tax. Agencies allowed in the country were limited to relief and rehabilitation programs. The government prohibited these groups from engaging in political and economic development activities, and required that they have a minimum of \$2 million in easily accessible cash deposits. The parallel requirement for national NGOs was \$1 million. There was an exodus of foreign NGOs as a result of these onerous requirements and most local agencies were inadvertently forced into closure because of their inability to comply.” **[9a] (page 4)**

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17. CORRUPTION

- 17.01 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated:

“The law does not provide criminal penalties for official corruption, and officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.

“Persons seeking executive and/or judicial services often must pay a ‘gift’ or bribe through a system of patronage and cronyism to access services. There were reports of petty corruption within the executive branch, largely based on family connections. Judicial corruption was also a problem, and illegal acts such as property theft were not prosecuted when carried out by certain military officials or former fighters from the independence struggle who were in favour with the government. Officials involved in the penal system often manipulated the family members of those in detention for illegal bribes or other favors.

“There were allegations of corruption among armed forces leaders involving illicit trade, the appropriation of houses, and the black market sale of goods such as diesel fuel and cement. Corruption was extensive for government services involving issuance of identification and travel documents, including in the passport office. Individuals requesting exit visas or passports often had to pay bribes.

“Police, who often were conscripted, were paid 15 nakfa (\$1) and corruption was a problem. Reports were common of police and other security force members committing crimes to supplement their income, including breaking into homes to steal jewelry, money, and food. Police typically used their influence to assist friends and family, such as facilitating their release from prison. Reports were common that police demanded bribes to release detainees and that military personnel systematically accepted money to smuggle citizens from the country and cooperated with human trafficking groups. There were no mechanisms to address allegations of official abuse, and impunity was a problem.

“Public officials were not subject to financial disclosure laws, and there was no government agency responsible for combating government corruption.” **[3b] (section 4)**

- 17.02 The Freedom House ‘Countries at the Crossroads 2011’ report, published on 4 November 2011, stated that:

“Corruption among individuals has historically been low in Eritrea and severely punished when uncovered, but the state and the ruling party have made extensive use of economic levers for political ends, often acting in concert, and the prosecution of corruption cases today reflects political expediency rather than consistent application of the law. It is common, for example, for the PFDJ to pressure enterprises to include it as a partner in new ventures and then exact payment or a percentage of profits for government cooperation. Meanwhile, strict controls on travel by Eritrean citizens have generated a lucrative business in exit visas. Graft and corruption among state bureaucrats has also grown, particularly at middle and lower levels where pay rates have stagnated as inflation rates have soared. The militarization of much of the country, with zonal commanders outranking civilian administrators, has also fostered widespread corruption in the allocation of housing, management of local businesses, and control of trade.” **[9a] (page 11)**

- 17.03 The Freedom House ‘Freedom in the World 2012’ report, published by on 18 May 2012, stated:

“Corruption continued to be a problem in 2011. The government’s control over foreign exchange effectively gives it sole authority over imports. At the same time, those in favor with the regime are allowed to profit from the smuggling and sale of scarce goods such as building materials, food, and alcohol. According to the International Crisis Group, senior military officials are the chief culprits in this trade. They have also been accused of enriching themselves by charging fees to assist the growing number of Eritreans who wish to flee the country, and using conscript labor for private building projects.” **[9c] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)**

- 17.04 Eritrea ranked 134th in Transparency International’s 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of 183 countries, published on 1 December 2011. Eritrea was given an overall CPI score of 2.5. The CPI defines corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain, and measures the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among a country’s public officials and politicians. The CPI is a composite index that draws on multiple expert opinion surveys. The CPI scores range from 10 (low level of corruption) to 0 (high level of corruption). **[16]**

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18. FREEDOM OF RELIGION

OVERVIEW

- 18.01 The United States State Department ‘International Religious Freedom Report for 2011: Eritrea’, published on 30 July 2012, stated:

“The constitution and other laws and policies provide for religious freedom; however, in practice the government did not implement these protections or respect religious freedom. The government demonstrated a trend toward deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom. The government continued to harass and detain members of registered and unregistered religious groups, some of whom reportedly died as a result of torture and lack of medical treatment while in detention. The government retained significant control over the four registered religious groups. Many places of worship had to close because of government intimidation and the mass conscription of religious workers and parishioners.” **[3c] (Executive Summary)**

- 18.02 The United States State Department ‘International Religious Freedom Report for 2011: Eritrea’, also stated:

“There were reports of abuses of religious freedom, including religious prisoners and detainees.

“The government demonstrated a trend toward deterioration in respect for religious freedom. The government continued to harass and detain members of registered and unregistered religious groups and retained significant control over the four registered religious groups. The government subjected religious prisoners to harsh conditions and held them for long periods of time without due process. There continued to be reports of forced renunciations of faith, torture, and deaths while in custody.” **[3c] (Section 2)**

RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

- 18.03 As regards the religious make-up of the Eritrean population, the United States State Department ‘International Religious Freedom Report for 2011: Eritrea’, stated:

“Although reliable statistics are not available, the government claims that 50 percent of the population is Christian and 50 percent Sunni Muslim. Reliable international sources estimate that the population is approximately 40 percent Christian and 60 percent Muslim. The Christian population is roughly 24 percent Orthodox Christian, 10 percent Roman Catholic, and 4 percent other groups (Protestants, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses). There is a small Baha’i community, and 2 percent of the population is animist. NGOs often estimate that there is a significant Muslim majority and larger populations of unregistered and unrecognized religious groups such as Pentecostals. The population is predominantly Muslim in the eastern and western lowlands and mainly Christian in the highlands. There are high levels of religious participation among all ethnic groups.” **[3c] (section 1)**

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RESTRICTIONS

- 18.04 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom '2012 Annual Report', covering the period 1 April 2011 - 29 February 2012, published on 20 March 2012, stated:

"In 2002, the government increased its control over civil society following a second war with Ethiopia, and imposed a registration requirement on all religious groups other than the four officially-recognized religions. The requirements mandated that communities provide detailed financial and membership information, as well as background on their activities in Eritrea. Among those affected were Protestant Evangelical and Pentecostal Christian denominations, as well as the Baha'is. Some of these religious communities have operated in Eritrea for decades.

"Because of the government's registration requirement, no group can legally hold public religious activities until its registration is approved. This effectively makes unregistered religious activity 'illegal' which has resulted in places of worship being closed and public religious activities, including worship services, of all unregistered religious communities being prohibited. No religious group has been registered since 2002, although the Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church, Seventh-day Adventists, and Baha'i religious community all submitted the required applications. As a result of the registration requirement and the government's inaction on registration applications, all of Eritrea's religious communities (except the four government-sanctioned ones) lack a legal basis on which to practice their faiths publicly, including holding prayer meetings or weddings." **[35] (Eritrea - p71)**

- 18.05 The United States State Department 'International Religious Freedom Report for 2011: Eritrea', stated:

"The government has officially registered four religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea, Sunni Islam, and the Roman Catholic Church. The government has not approved the applications for registration of the Meherte Yesus Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Faith Mission Church, or the Baha'i Faith, despite their having met all registration requirements since 2002. All registrations require the president's signature for full approval.

"Religious groups must obtain government approval to conduct religious services or activities. The Office of Religious Affairs reviews applications for religious groups seeking to be officially recognized. Application materials must include: a description of the history of the religious group in the country, an explanation of the uniqueness or benefit the group offers compared with other religious groups, names and personal information of the group's leaders, detailed information on assets, a description of the group's conformity to "local culture," and a declaration of all foreign sources of funding.

"Religious organizations must obtain government approval to build facilities for worship and must observe strict rules governing relations between religious organizations and foreign donors and sponsors.

"Religious groups must receive authorization from the Office of Religious Affairs to print and distribute documents. The Office of Religious Affairs routinely approves such requests, but only for officially recognized religious organizations...the government bans religious organizations from involvement in politics and restricts the right of religious media to comment on political matters." **[3c] (section 2)**

- 18.06 The United States State Department 'International Religious Freedom Report for 2011: Eritrea' also stated:

"Recognized religious groups were often forbidden from managing their own operations and finances. The government appointed both the mufti (head) of the Islamic community in the country and the current patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, as well as numerous other lower-level positions. The government maintained control over the operations of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. A government-appointed lay administrator managed church operations and controlled all church donations. All four recognized religious groups were also required to provide a list of members for possible enrollment in military and national service. Those who publicly protested such direct government management were branded as radicals or gay and were imprisoned indefinitely under harsh conditions, even if they were members of recognized religious groups. Unregistered religious groups also reported having their mail confiscated. In addition, they avoided local internet providers when sending or receiving information related to their religion for fear of being monitored.

"The government did not appoint the president of the Lutheran Church, but reliable sources indicated extensive government coordination. The Pope appointed the highest-ranking Catholic Church official; however, the government put pressure on the church to conform its activities to government policies.

"Former Orthodox Patriarch Abune Antonios remained under house arrest and went on a hunger strike in July [2011] to protest his continued detention. He was reportedly in grave health as a result.

"Religious facilities that did not belong to the four officially recognized religious groups were forced to close following a 2002 government decree that all religious groups must register or cease all religious activities. As a result, there were many large abandoned churches in Asmara. Some local authorities quietly tolerated unregistered groups who worshipped in homes or rented spaces, but some others did not allow such groups to meet. The government continued to disrupt home-based worship and arrested those who hosted prayer meetings." **[3c] (section 2)**

- 18.07 The Human Rights Watch '2012 World Report', published on 22 January 2012, stated:

"Usually reliable sources who monitor religious persecutions reported continuing persecution of religious practitioners in 2011. Thirty members of an evangelical Christian church were arrested in Asmara in January. In May and June authorities reportedly arrested over 90 members of unrecognized Christian churches, including 26 college students. Two women and one man in their twenties, arrested in 2009 for participating in prayer meetings while serving in national service, reportedly died in captivity at military camps in 2011. A 62-year-old Jehovah's Witness arrested in 2008 died in July, a week after he was placed in solitary confinement in a metal shipping container." **[29b]**

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CHRISTIAN PENTECOSTALS AND EVANGELICALS

- 18.08 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom '2012 Annual Report', published on 20 March 2012, stated:

“The State Department, non-governmental human rights organizations, and Christian advocacy groups estimate that 2,000 to 3,000 persons are imprisoned on religious grounds in Eritrea, the vast majority of whom are Evangelical or Pentecostal Christians...there were several reports of new incidents of mass arrests in late 2010 and throughout 2011. In November 2010, 40 parishioners from the Kale-Hiwet and Mulu-Wengel evangelical churches were arrested. Two of the women were released in March prior to giving birth; the others remain in custody. On December 30, 2010, more than 100 Christians, including the entire congregation of the Philadelphia Church of Asmara, were arrested and allegedly beaten. In May 2011, 64 evangelical Christians were arrested; only six have been released. On June 2, 2011, 26 Christian college students were arrested for reportedly refusing to participate in Independence Day celebrations; they were released a few weeks later. On July 3, 35 Pentecostal Christians were arrested and continue to be imprisoned...the government’s campaign against religious activities by persons belonging to unregistered denominations frequently targets Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. Government officials have criticized non-traditional Christian denominations for engaging in evangelism that they allege is socially divisive and alien to Eritrea’s cultural traditions. The ruling party also fears that these religious communities could be encouraged by their co-religionists in the United States to take actions against the government’s undemocratic rule. As discussed above, in the past year Eritrean security forces continued to conduct mass arrests of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, including at prayer meetings, although fewer such arrests were reported than in previous years.” **[35] (Eritrea – p72)**

- 18.09 The Amnesty International ‘Annual Report 2012: The state of the world’s human rights’, covering events in 2011, published on 24 May 2012, stated:

“More than 3,000 Christians from unregistered church groups, including 51 Jehovah’s Witnesses, were believed to be arbitrarily detained.

- In May [2011], 64 Christians were reportedly arrested in a village near Asmara. Six were released but the remaining 58 continued to be arbitrarily detained. In June [2011] it was reported that over 26 college students were arrested on suspicion of practising an unregistered faith, and were detained at an undisclosed location. It was believed that the majority were taken to Me’eter prison, which was regularly used to imprison religious detainees.
- In November [2011], Mussie Eyob, an evangelist, was returned to Eritrea after being arrested for proselytizing in Saudi Arabia. He was believed to be in incommunicado detention...
- In October [2011] it was reported that three Christians had died in detention. Two women, Terhase Gebremichel Andu and Ferewine Genzabu Kifly, reportedly died in Adersete Military Camp in western Eritrea because of harsh conditions and ill-treatment. They had been detained since 2009, when they were arrested during a prayer meeting in a private home. Angesom Teklom Habtemichel reportedly died of malaria, after he had been denied medical treatment, in Adi Nefase Military Camp, Asab, after two years of arbitrary detention.” **[6b]**

- 18.10 The ASSIST News Service report, ‘Two die in prison and over 100 detained in church raids in Eritrea’, dated 4 February 2011, stated:

“Two Christians are reported to have died in separate Eritrean prisons after being refused medical treatment amid a renewed crackdown by the authorities against unregistered churches.

“According to Barnabas Aid, one of the martyrs is known to be 27-year-old woman Seble Hagos Mebrahtu, who was arrested after being caught reading a Bible in her bedroom. Her death comes as a new wave of raids, which started on New Year's Eve [31 December 2010], saw more than 100 evangelical believers detained.

“Barnabas Aid says almost an entire congregation - 41 people - from the capital Asmara was taken into custody where they are said to have endured beatings.

“The following day, 27 believers from various underground churches near Asmara were rounded up by the security forces. On January 9 [2011], 35 Christians including 15 women and two elderly men in poor health were seized from a house church gathering in the town of Nakfa,” the group said in an update.” [55]

18.11 The Christian Solidarity Worldwide ‘Eritrea: Summary of Concerns and Recommendations’ press release, dated April 2012, stated:

“Between 2,500 and 3,000 Christians are currently detained indefinitely at any given time. Although some were initially released after pledging to renounce their faith, none have been formally charged or tried and all are held pending similar denials of faith. Reports persist of prisoners dying after torture, or after being denied life-saving medication for refusing to deny their faith. Torture is rife in these centres, with prisoners being held in such inhumane conditions as metal shipping containers, underground cells, and in the open air in desert areas where they are surrounded by barbed wire or thorns. Female Christian prisoners are regularly beaten on the soles of their feet and their wombs, allegedly to prevent them from bearing children.” [50b]

See also [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#).

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JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES

18.12 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom ‘2012 Annual Report’ stated:

“Fifty-three Jehovah’s Witnesses are detained without trial or administrative appeal. A third of the Jehovah’s Witnesses currently detained are reported to be over 60 years old, well beyond draft age. Additionally, three Jehovah’s Witnesses - Paulos Eyassu, Isaac Mogos, Negede Teklemariam - have been held for more than 15 years despite the maximum legal penalty for refusing to perform national service being two years...since 1994, the government of Eritrea has denied Jehovah’s Witnesses citizenship and a range of government services, as well as civil and political rights. President Isais Afwerki issued a decree in October 1994 specifically barring Jehovah’s Witnesses from obtaining government jobs, business licenses, and government-issued identity and travel documents. He reportedly viewed their refusal on religious grounds to participate in the 1993 independence referendum or to perform mandatory national military service as a rejection of Eritrean citizenship. Without Eritrean identity cards Jehovah’s Witnesses cannot obtain legal recognition of marriages or land purchases.

“The government requires a military training component for secondary school graduation, with no non-military alternative service option, which effectively denies educational and employment opportunities to young Jehovah’s Witnesses, causing many to flee the country. Some children of Jehovah’s Witnesses have been expelled from school because of their refusal to salute the flag or to pay for membership in the officially-sanctioned national organization for youth and students.” **[35] (Eritrea - p73)**

- 18.13 The United States State Department ‘International Religious Freedom Report for 2011: Eritrea’, stated:

“Although members of several religious groups were imprisoned in past years for failure to participate in required national military service, the government singled out Jehovah’s Witnesses to receive harsher treatment than that given to others. Jehovah’s Witnesses and other conscientious objectors were normally willing to perform nonmilitary national service, which the government did not allow. In conducting searches for national military service evaders, security forces continued to target gatherings of unregistered religious groups more frequently than those of other organizations. At least three Jehovah’s Witnesses have been detained for 15 years, reportedly for evading compulsory military service, a term far beyond the maximum legal penalty of two years. In addition, Jehovah’s Witnesses who did not participate in national military service were subject to dismissal from the civil service; revocation of business licenses; eviction from government-owned housing; and denial of passports, identity cards, exit visas, and government services. They also were prohibited from having civil authorities legalize their marriages. According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ official website, at the end of the year, 51 of their members were in prison in the country because of their religious beliefs or conscience.” **[3c] (section 2)**

See also [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#) ; [National service - conscientious objection](#) and [Citizenship and nationality](#).

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MUSLIMS

- 18.14 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom ‘2012 Annual Report’ stated that:

“The Department of Religious Affairs appoints the Mufti of the Eritrean Muslim community, despite community protests. The government does not permit Muslim religious activities or groups it views as radical. Government officials point to the actions of foreign or foreign-inspired Muslim fundamentalists, whom they believe are seeking to radicalize the traditional Eritrean practice of Islam and thus possibly create tensions in a society that is roughly half Christian and half Muslim.” **[35] (Eritrea - p70)**

- 18.15 The ‘Freedom in the World 2012’ report, published by Freedom House on 18 May 2012, stated that: “Muslims also complain of discrimination. In 2010, a leading Islamic organization accused the government of marginalizing Muslims, closing traditional Muslim schools, persecuting religious leaders, and appropriating Muslim-owned land.” **[9c] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)**

ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ERITREA

- 18.16 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom '2012 Annual Report' stated that:

"The government's interference in the internal affairs of the Orthodox Church began increasing in 2005, after the Church started resisting Asmara's demands. The Orthodox Church of Eritrea is the country's largest Christian denomination and the institutional expression of the country's traditionally-dominant form of Christianity. Security forces began targeting reformist elements in the Orthodox Church, arresting religious activists, and preventing their meetings. In July 2005, the government revoked the exemption of Orthodox priests, monks, and deacons from mandatory national service, reportedly resulting in a shortage of clergy, particularly in smaller, rural churches. In May 2006, the government appointed a new Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Eritrea, replacing Patriarch Antonios and placing him under house arrest.

"According to the Eritrean Orthodox Church North America Archdioceses, more than 1,700 Orthodox clergy have been forced out of the church, including 24 imprisoned, 14 banned from entering Eritrean Orthodox Church properties, and seven restricted from leaving Asmara. Hundreds have fled the country. In addition, a government-appointed administrator, who is not a member of the Orthodox clergy, manages the Church's affairs and controls its finances." [35] (Eritrea - p73-74)

See also [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#).

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19. ETHNIC GROUPS

- 19.01 The report entitled 'The Constitutional and Legislative Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Eritrea', published by the International Labour Organisation and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights in 2009, stated:

"It is generally recognised that there are nine ethnic groups in Eritrea. These groups may be divided into three categories, according to their historical evolution from ancient races: the Semitic; the Hamitic (Cushitic); and the Nilotic races. The Semitic group forms the majority of the population, and consists of the Tigrinya (48 per cent of the total population) and the Tigre (35 per cent). The Rashaida (1 per cent), a recently-established group of Arab origin, may also be included in the Semitic family. Four ethnic groups comprise the Cushitic category: the Afar (4 per cent of the total population); the Saho (3 per cent); the Bilen (2 per cent); and the Hedareb (2 per cent). The Nilotic groups are the Kunama (with 3 per cent of the total population) and the Nara (2 per cent). Jiberti Muslims regard themselves as an additional (tenth) ethnic group. In addition, there is a small group of recently-settled migrants said to be descendants of the Hausa tribe in Nigeria, called the Tekurir. At present, the Eritrean government recognises all these groups - with the exception of the Jeberti and the Tekurir.

"The Tigrinya live on the central and southern plateau. The Tigre groups inhabit the northern hills and lowlands. The Afar live among the southern Red Sea coast. The Bilen are located in the Northern Eritrean highlands and in and around the city of Keren and north of it in the region of Halhal (the Bogos area). The Hedareb live in the western lowlands and along the border with Sudan. The Kunama occupy the region between the Gash and Setit rivers, near the border with Ethiopia. The Nara reside north of the Gash river around Barentu. The Tekurir live in the Anseba and Gash-Barka regions. The

Rashaida live along the Red Sea coast. The Saho live on the escarpment and coastal plain southeast of Asmara. To some extent, most of the ethnic groups exist across the boundaries of the present-day Ethiopia, Djibouti and the Sudan.” **[36] (pages 3-4)**

- 19.02 More information about Eritrea’s ethnic groups was provided in the Everyculture.com website, undated, accessed on 23 May 2012:

“The highland Tigrinya ethnic group is the dominant group, numerically, politically, and economically. There is also a minority group of Tigrinya-speaking Muslims called Jeberti in the highlands. The Jeberti, however, are not recognized as a separate ethnic group by the Eritrean government. The lowland groups -the Afar, Beja/Hadarab, Bileyn, Kunama, Nara, Rashaida, Saho, and Tigre - are all, with the exception of the Tigre, relatively small and, taken together, they do not form any homogenous cultural or political blocs. Traditionally, the relationship between the highland and lowland groups has been one of tension and conflict. Raids on livestock and encroachment on land and grazing rights have led to mutual distrust, which is still, to a certain degree, relevant in the relation between the minorities and the state. Many of the groups are also divided between Eritrea and Ethiopia, Sudan, and Djibouti, making cross-border ethnic alliances a possible threat to the national identity.” **[37]**

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LANGUAGES

- 19.03 The Ethnologue website, Languages of Eritrea section, accessed on 23 May 2012, lists the languages spoken in Eritrea as: Afar, Arabic, Bedawiyet, Bilen, English, Italian, Kunama, Nara, Saho, Tigré and Tigrigna. The same source noted that English, standard Arabic, and Tigrinya are the official languages. **[38]**

- 19.04 More information about the languages spoken in Eritrea was provided in the Everyculture.com website, undated, accessed on 23 May 2012:

“Although the Eritrean Constitution states that all nine ethnic languages in the country are equal, the government of Eritrea has two administrative languages: Tigrinya and Arabic. Tigrinya is a Semitic language also spoken by the Tigreans of Ethiopia. Arabic was chosen to represent the lowland Muslim groups in the country. Nevertheless, only one ethnic group, the Rashaida, has Arabic as a mother tongue, whereas the other groups use it as a religious language. Many of the groups are bilingual, and because of the legacy of Ethiopian domination over Eritrea, many Eritreans also speak Amharic, the Ethiopian administrative language. Eritrean pupils are today taught in their mother tongue in primary levels (one through five), and English takes over to be the language of instruction from sixth grade (at least in theory). English is taught as a second language from second grade. It appears, however, that Tigrinya is taking over as the dominant language, since the majority of the population are Tigrinya-speakers, the biggest towns are located in the highlands, and most people in government and the state bureaucracy are from the Tigrinya ethnic group.” **[37]**

- 19.05 The ILO and African Commission on Human and People’s Rights, ‘The Constitutional and Legislative Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Eritrea’, report, published in 2009, stated:

“The Constitution guarantees equality of all Eritrean languages (article 4(3)). It was deliberately left to the wisdom of the courts and, more importantly, to future generations to decide as the situation warrants whether there shall be an official language or not...In a historical perspective, the Italians encouraged the use of their language rather than the native languages while the British encouraged both Tigrinya and Arabic as co-official languages and languages of education. Linguistically, the nine most widely-spoken languages in Eritrea fall into three major language families. Afar, Bilen, Hidareb and Saho are Cushitic languages, Tigrinya, Tigre and Arabic belong to the Semitic group, and Nara and Kunama are Nilo-Saharan. As far as the nature of bilingualism is concerned, it can generally be argued that the majority of the western lowland-dwellers speak Tigre as either their first or second language. Arabic is not as a matter of fact a real lingua franca [*italics in text of source*] at a national or sub-national level...however, it is a sacred and prestigious language for Muslims in Eritrea and is the preferred spoken language among the Muslim elite. As a result, Arabic remains a language of official ceremonies, national gatherings and government declarations. In this sense, therefore, both Tigrinya and Arabic enjoy both statutory and official status.

“In general it can be said that Tigrinya and Tigre together are spoken by about 83 per cent of the total population and are widely distributed throughout the country. Both languages serve as languages of inter-ethnic communication in that many members of other nationalities use one of the languages as a second language. Multilingualism is common as most of the numerical minority groups speak Tigre or Tigrinya or both in addition to their mother-tongue.” **[36] (pages 35-36)**

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GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

- 19.06 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated:

“Discrimination against minorities was a problem. There were reports of government and societal discrimination against the Kunama, one of nine ethnic groups, who reside primarily in the northwest.

“Web sites [*sic*] stated that the government ignored the impact of the June 12 [2011] Nabro volcano eruption on ethnic minorities who resided in the area near the volcano.

“Governmental and societal abuse of Ethiopians occurred. Ethiopians were arbitrarily arrested and asked to pay bribes to be released.

“Requests from citizens in rural areas (where ethnic minorities are concentrated) for basic services, such as an adequate number of schools, were routinely ignored by the government.” **[3b] (section 6)**

- 19.07 The ILO and African Commission on Human and People’s Rights, ‘The Constitutional and Legislative Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Eritrea’, report, published in 2009, stated:

“Generally, the numerical majority ethnic groups, particularly the Tigrinya, tend to regard all minority ethnic groups as ‘less developed’ and ‘less advanced’. However, such an attitude is more pronounced towards the Kunama, the Nara, and the Tekurir, who face social marginalisation as a result...t

he Kunama, in particular, have been singled out as unpatriotic. Although the Kunama participated in the Eritrean independence struggle, they are sometimes blamed for lacking strong allegiance with the independence state...Going beyond mere stigmatisation, all three of these groups have been subjected to marginalisation. There is no official policy of political marginalisation, and the nine officially-recognised ethnic groups are mostly represented in various public presentation, cultural performances, national documents and, importantly, the national media. The exceptions are the Tekurir and Jiberti Muslims. However, marginalisation does occur due to the dominance of the culture and way of life of the two major ethnic groups, which have gradually influenced the culture and way of life of the other groups. This is illustrated most clearly in the high rate of resettlement of the members of the Tigrinya ethnic group, who form the core of ex-soldiers resettled by the government on the settlements and living areas of the Kunama and the Nara.” **[36] (pages 5-6)**

- 19.08 The ‘Freedom in the World 2012’ report, published by Freedom House on 18 May 2012, stated that: “The Kunama people, one of Eritrea’s nine ethnic groups, reportedly face severe discrimination. They are viewed with suspicion for having backed a rival group to the EPLF during the war of independence and for resisting attempts to integrate them into national society. Members of the Afar ethnic group have also been targeted.”

[9c] (Political Rights and Civil Liberties)

- 19.09 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) ‘Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-seekers from Eritrea’, published on 20 April 2011, stated that:

“Discriminatory measures against minority ethnic groups are historically motivated and rooted in socio-cultural bias. Perceived as having supported Ethiopia during the war of independence and a potential threat to the nationalistic policies of the Eritrean Government, the Kunama are reportedly subject to discrimination, harassment and other intimidation techniques. Historically, the Afar people have also been perceived as ambivalent in their support for the Eritrean People Liberation Front.

“The land reform introduced by the Government after independence abolished all traditional land tenure forms and made all land the property of the State. As a result, the plains of Gash-Setit traditionally inhabited by the Kunama were used for resettlement and agricultural plantation schemes. The new land policy is seen as effectively undermining the clan-based traditional ownership rights of the Kunama. The encroachment on Kunama land rights and the targeting of their cultural sites and symbols have spawned resistance movements such as the Democratic Movement for the Liberation of the Eritrean Kunama (DMLEK) and the Eritrean Democratic Resistance Movement (EDRM). This resistance has only increased the perception by the Eritrean authorities of the Kunama as ‘Ethiopian collaborators and spies’. The Kunama are reportedly particularly vulnerable to arbitrary arrest and detention.” **[32b] (p31-2)**

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20. LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX PERSONS

- 20.01 The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association ‘State-sponsored Homophobia - A world survey of laws prohibiting same-sex activity between

consenting adults' report, published in May 2012, stated that in legislative terms, Eritrea follows the old Ethiopian law and same-sex sexual acts (both male and female) are illegal (Article 600 of the 1957 Penal Code). The punishment for same-sex acts is imprisonment. The actual prison sentence, determined by the courts, can be as short as ten days or as long as three years (Article 105 of the 1957 Penal Code). **[40] (p22)**

- 20.02 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', published on 24 May 2012, stated that:

"The law criminalizes consensual same-sex sexual activity. Individuals continued to be detained for alleged consensual same-sex sexual activity. During the year [2011] there were unconfirmed reports that the government carried out periodic roundups of individuals considered gay and lesbian. Gay men and lesbians faced severe societal discrimination. The government repeatedly accused foreign governments of promoting the practice to undermine the government. There were reports that known gay men and lesbians in the armed forces were subjected to severe abuse. There were no known lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender organizations in the country." **[3b] (section 6)**

- 20.03 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 'Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Eritrea,' published on 20 April 2011, stated that:

"Consensual same-sex conduct is criminalized under the Transitional Penal Code and punishable by imprisonment from ten days to three years. Only rather limited information is available on the treatment of LGBTI [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex] individuals in Eritrea. It has nevertheless been reported that LGBTI individuals face severe societal discrimination and are also subjected to likewise severe abuse in the military. It has also been reported that the authorities have carried out periodic round-ups of LGBTI individuals. The Eritrean Government has recently rejected a recommendation by the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review to legalize same-sex activity between consenting adults, deeming it 'in direct contradiction with the values and traditions of the Eritrean people.'" **[32b]**

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21. WOMEN

LEGAL RIGHTS

- 21.01 Eritrea acceded to the UN Convention to Eliminate on all forms of Discrimination against Women on 5 September 1995. (UN Treaties Databases, 17 August 2012) **[85]** A national report submitted by the Eritrean government in 2009 to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the purposes of a United Nations Universal Periodic Review [A/HRC/WG.6/6/ERI/1], carried out in 2009, stated:

"The Constitution of Eritrea and other pertinent laws guarantee equality of all persons under the law. It further provides that no person may be discriminated against on account of race, ethnic origin, language, colour, gender, religion, disability, age, political view, or social or economic status or any other improper factors...it has always been a basic State policy of Eritrea to promote equality between men and women. Eritrea has put in place a variety of legal regimes for protecting the rights and interests of women. This regime has been reflected, inter alia, in the Transitional Civil Code of Eritrea, such

as family law, the Land Proclamation No. 58/1994, Election of Regional Assemblies Proclamation No. 140/2004, and a Proclamation to Abolish Female Circumcision No. 158/2007.

“The Eritrean Constitution and other pertinent laws guaranty [sic] equal rights for women and men. In addition to the supreme principle enshrined in the Constitution prohibiting discrimination on account of race, ethnic origin, language, color, gender, religion, disability, age, political view, social or economic status, various Articles in the Constitution grant equal right to women as men...right after the independence of Eritrea, the Provisional Government undertook measures to revise the inherited colonial laws. Consequently, Proclamation No.2/1991 (the Transitional Civil Code of Eritrea) and Proclamation No. 4/1991 (the Transitional Penal Code of Eritrea) repealed all discriminatory clauses and connotations from the colonial Civil Codes and included protective legal measures. To mention some important provisions in the Transitional Codes pertaining to the status of women:

- “Marriage is now based on the free consent of both partners, and needs no parental consent. The age of the female partner was raised to 18 from the previous 15 years;
- Women can enter into a contract of marriage freely;
- bride price and abduction were prohibited by law;
- Irregular unions have been abolished because they don’t provide any legal protection of women’s right[s] upon separation;
- the death penalty is commuted to life imprisonment for convicted women who may be pregnant or have children under three years of age;
- abortion, although still punishable under the penal code, is permitted in situations where a physician certifies that the mother would suffer grave and permanent damage due to severe physical and mental stress, or when the pregnancy has resulted from rape or incest;
- Rape is punishable by law with a maximum imprisonment of 15 years;
- Pornography and other indecent and obscene exposure are also punishable under the Transitional Penal code of Eritrea; and
- A provision of the colonial Civil Code which bluntly glorifies the husband as head of the family was repealed and replaced by a new Article which recognizes the equal power and status of the spouses.” [73a]

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POLITICAL RIGHTS

21.02 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated: “Women held four nominal ministerial positions in the government:

justice, labor and human welfare, tourism, and health. Women also served in other senior government positions, such as mayors and regional administrators.”

[3b] (section 3)

- 21.03 The National Union of Eritrean Women website, undated, accessed on 25 February 2011, provided the following information about the participation of women in society:

“The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) had a clear policy on the issue of women. As a result, its popular motto 'Equality through Participation' served not only as a slogan, but also as a practical doctrine in the struggle for the emancipation of women.

“The 1st and 2nd congresses of the EPLF, held in 1977 and 1987 respectively, clearly stated the Front's principles on the rights and equality of women.

“This trend continued after independence. Policy and legislative measures were taken to insure the participation of women, who comprise half of the society. The fact that 30% of parliament seats are exclusively reserved for women, who can, moreover, contest the other seats in the elections, is an example of some of the measures taken to that end.

“The Constitution of Eritrea guarantees equal rights for both sexes. The Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) made a deliberate effort to ensure women's participation in every stage of the constitution-making process.” **[78]**

See also [Political system](#) and [Political affiliation](#).

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SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

- 21.04 Information published in the [peacewomen.org](#) website, undated, accessed on 24 February 2011, stated that the Eritrean government ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on 5 September 1995. **[77]**

- 21.05 The World Organisation Against Torture report, 'Violence against Girls in Eritrea - a report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child', dated 7 July 2004, stated:

“The Constitution of Eritrea has strong protections of women's rights, a reflection of the high status women attained by participating in the liberation struggle as fighters. However, the respect women gained through the war and the resulting gender sensitive laws are in direct contrast to the traditional Eritrean attitude towards women and girls...although Eritrea is composed of several different cultures, with differing perspectives towards women, customary views generally dominate many areas of society and are often discriminatory towards women and girls. This is especially true within the realm of the family, and is thus, extremely important when examining the rights of girls.” **[71] (pages 201-202)**

- 21.06 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', published on 24 May 2012, stated:

“Women have a legal right to equal educational opportunities, equal pay for equal work, and equal property rights; however, in practice men retained privileged access to education, employment, and control of economic resources, particularly in rural areas.

Women generally did not enjoy a social status equal to men...the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare and the Ministry of Health are the primary government offices responsible for ensuring [the] legal rights of women along with the quasigovernmental National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW).” **[3b] (section 6)**

- 21.07 The Social Institutions and Gender Index (Eritrea section), 2012 version, accessed on 23 May 2012, provided the following information:

“The Eritrean Constitution provides for full ownership rights for women. The Eritrean People’s Liberation Front established a policy on land redistribution to improve women’s access to land by granting extensive land rights to divorced, widowed and childless women. However, the distribution of land is in most cases handled by land distribution committees at village level. The National Union of Eritrean Women reports that negative attitudes of local authorities towards women’s land rights prevents the principle of gender equality being implemented in practice. The land rights of married women are often subsumed under male household heads when land is allocated and registered. The position of women in polygamous marriages is also unclear as husbands can claim land for one wife only. Many women also lack the means of working the land and face specific difficulties, especially in regions in which cultural norms prevent women from clearing land.

“With regard to access to property other than land, Eritrean women have equal rights to conclude contracts, administer property and run businesses. In 2003, 41 percent of all business licenses issued in the Central Region of Eritrea over the previous five years were to women.

“There are no laws that discriminate against women with respect to access to credit. However, in practice, a lack of property and collateral make it difficult for Eritrean women to access capital in commercial banks, where they access only 9 percent of available credit. The Government’s Savings and Micro Credit Programme is the largest micro-credit provider in the country and 40% of its customers are women.” **[15]**

- 21.08 A United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women report [CEDAW/C/ERI/CO/3], dated 3 February 2006, stated:

“While noting the advocacy work carried out by the National Union of Eritrean Women, the Committee is concerned that the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the role and responsibilities of women and men in society, which are discriminatory to women. The Committee is concerned that the preservation of negative cultural practices and traditional attitudes serve to perpetuate women’s subordination in the family and society and constitute serious obstacles to women’s enjoyment of their human rights...while recognizing the efforts undertaken by the State party aimed at the reconstruction of the country and its socio-economic fabric after the long years of armed conflict as well as recurrent droughts, the Committee is concerned that the widespread poverty among women and the poor socio-economic conditions are among the causes of the violation of women’s human rights and discrimination against them. The Committee is concerned at the very large number of women heads of household who are particularly vulnerable to poverty...the Committee is especially concerned about the situation of women in rural areas who often lack access to health, education, clean water and sanitation services and means and opportunities for economic survival.” **[33b] (pages 3 and 5)**

21.09 The same United Nations report also stated concerning marriage and family relations:

“While noting that the Transitional Code of Eritrea adopted in 1991 establishes a minimum age at marriage, prohibits forced marriages and establishes a system of equitable division of marital property upon divorce, the Committee is concerned that these laws are not enforced and that discriminatory customary laws and practices continue to be applied. The Committee is also concerned that the Transitional Code’s provisions on marriage and family relations do not apply to Muslim marriages and divorces.” **[33b] (p5)**

21.10 A United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women report on the status of Eritrean women, dated 18 January 2006, stated:

“At this time, Eritrea’s majority population still follows Sharia law as opposed to national law. Although the legal age for marriage is 18, underage marriage remains prevalent. Raising awareness of national laws is a constant effort, involving attitude changes among the people of Eritrea. One particular setback in the struggle against early marriage was that many children had no birth registration enabling parents to simply bring a witness to testify a girl was 18, when she may in fact be much younger...in recent developments, one of Eritrea’s six regions appointed a female governor in 2005. In addition, the city of Massawa has voted a female mayor into office. Measures have been taken regarding participation of government service positions including hiring through positive discrimination, and lower educational level requirements (although opportunities to upgrade academic levels are available through evening courses as well as correspondence). There is currently unprecedented representation of women in the local judicial structures.” **[33a] (p2)**

21.11 The World Organisation Against Torture report, ‘Violence against Girls in Eritrea - a report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child’, dated 7 July 2004, stated:

“Eritrean civil law provides that the minimum age for marriage for both girls and boys is 18. Nevertheless, customary law carries great weight in Eritrean society and often girls are married at ages well below the legal limit.

“It is widely acknowledged in Eritrea that girls are married earlier than boys. The traditional view holds that the ideal age for marriage for a girl is between 12 and 18. In one study, the view was expressed that marrying girls at a young age was necessary to ensure their virginity before marriage and protect ‘the woman from sin’. The ideal age for marriage for men is not correspondent with that of women. In the study mentioned above, many respondents claimed that men should wait until they are between at least 20 and 25, with some asserting that 25 be the minimum age, because of the many responsibilities a man assumes once he is married.” **[71] (page 206)**

21.12 A report submitted by the Sexual Rights Initiative (an association of NGOs including Mulabi, Action Canada, Action India, Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning, and others) to the United Nations Human Rights Council, in December 2009, for the purposes of a universal periodic review, stated:

“The Constitution guarantees freedom of movement to everyone and the transitional civil code provides both spouses with the right to choose residence. However, deeply rooted traditions practically necessitate that after marriage a woman automatically holds the domicile of her spouse. Socially, men are entitled to select their wives, although women have no such entitlement, especially in the patriarchal rural communities. In

rural areas, women after marriage stay at home, and never go out without the permission of their husbands. The father at home is the dominant figure financially and socially and his daughters cannot go out with men or getting [sic] married without his permission. Women are not allowed any relationship outside the marriage frame, and it is hard for the women to travel alone seeking education or work especially in rural areas away from Asmara.” [70]

- 21.13 The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) website, accessed on 3 July 2012, provided the following statistical information on life expectancy, education and health:

Eritrean women - Statistics (UNICEF)	
Life expectancy: females as a percentage of males, 2010 Life expectancy: The number of years newborn children would live if subject to the mortality risks prevailing for the cross-section of population at the time of their birth.	108
Adult literacy rate: females as a percentage of males, 2005 - 2010*	72
Enrolment ratios: females as a percentage of males, Primary gross enrolment ratios school 2007-2010* The gross enrolment ratio is the number of children enrolled in a schooling level (primary or secondary), regardless of age, divided by the population of the age group that officially corresponds to that level.	83
Enrolment ratios: females as a percentage of males, Secondary gross enrolment ratios school 2007-2010* The gross enrolment ratio is the number of children enrolled in a schooling level (primary or secondary), regardless of age, divided by the population of the age group that officially corresponds to that level.	71
Survival rate to last grade of primary: females as percentage of males 2006-2009*	No data
Contraceptive prevalence (%), 2006-2010*	8
Antenatal care coverage (%), At least once, 2006 -2010*	70
Antenatal care coverage (%), At least four times, 2006 -	41

2010*	
Delivery care coverage (%), Skilled attendant at birth, 2006 - 2010*	28
Delivery care coverage (%), Institutional delivery, 2006 - 2010*	26

* Data refers to the most recent year available during the period specified in the column heading. **[52a]**

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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

- 21.14 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated:

“Rape is a crime punishable by up to 10 years of imprisonment. Gang rape or rape of a minor or an invalid is punishable by up to 15 years in prison. Sexual assault is punishable by six months to eight years in prison. Spousal rape is not specifically outlawed. No information was available on the prevalence of rape. Authorities often responded to reports of rape by encouraging the perpetrator to marry the victim. Allegations of women being raped while attending mandatory military and educational training at the Sawa camp were common.

“Violence against women occurred and was pervasive in rural areas. Domestic violence is a crime; however, domestic violence cases were rarely brought to trial, and there were no legal penalties. Women seldom openly discussed domestic violence because of societal pressures. Such incidents were more commonly addressed, if at all, within families or by [the] clergy. The authorities’ response to domestic violence was hindered by a lack of trained personnel, inadequate funding, and unsupportive societal attitudes.” **[3b] (section 6)**

- 21.15 The World Organisation Against Torture report, ‘Violence against Girls in Eritrea - a report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child’, dated 7 July 2004, stated that: “Marital rape is not a crime under Eritrean law, as the Transitional Penal Code provides in Article 589 that rape, by definition, must occur outside of marriage. The Draft Penal Code foresees a slight change in this definition, recognizing rape between spouses where the spouses are separated and living in different households.” **[71] (p205)**

- 21.16 The Social Institutions and Gender Index, undated, accessed on 23 May 2012, noted that:

“Studies on the prevalence of violence against women vary, with one regional study finding 40% of women had been victims of domestic violence and another finding a prevalence of 90% if the category included by sexual and domestic violence. Violence against women is also underreported in Eritrea. One study of women who experienced domestic violence found that nearly half (46 percent) kept their experience of domestic

violence a secret and less than a quarter (21 percent) reported their husbands to the police.” [15]

National service

21.17 Regarding national service and abuses against women, the United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’ stated that: “The law requires that women, starting from grade 12, participate in national service, although girls already married were generally exempt. During the year [2011] the government continued efforts to detain female draft evaders and deserters. Women drafted for national service were subjected to sexual harassment and other abuse.” [3b] (section 6)

21.18 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) ‘Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-seekers from Eritrea’, published on 20 April 2011, stated that:

“Sexual violence against female conscripts within the military is being reported by human rights monitors. Some female conscripts are reportedly subject to sexual harassment and violence, including rape, by their supervisors. It is reported that female conscripts are coerced into having sex with commanders, including through threats of heavy military duties, harsh postings, and denial of home leave. Refusal to submit to sexual exploitation and abuse is allegedly punished by detention, torture and ill-treatment, including exposure to extreme heat and limitation of food rations. No effective mechanism for redress and protection exists within or outside the military, and perpetrators generally go unpunished. Women, who become pregnant as a result, are decommissioned and likely to experience social ostracism from their families and communities as unmarried mothers.” [32b] (p18)

21.19 A Human Rights Concern - Eritrea report, ‘International Women’s Day Celebration in Eritrea’, dated 9 March 2010, provided more information about the abuses committed against women:

“It is compulsory for Eritrean women to serve in the national service where they are not treated as equals with the male soldiers, who themselves are there against their wishes and maltreated, but used as sex objects by the military officers and made to work as housemaids-cum-slaves. Women are subjected to abuses and sexual harassment by officers in the training/concentration camps, prisons and the army. Refusal to meet the demands of the officers usually results in torture and reassignment to places with extremely hostile living and working conditions.” [45]

21.20 The same Human Rights Concern - Eritrea report also stated that:

“In most Eritrean ethnic groups recruitment of women into the military is traditionally not accepted. Women thus recruited are therefore shunned as suitable wives and mothers. They are maltreated by the army and ostracised by the rest of Eritrean society. Paradoxically, childbirth provides the only release from national service into a socially and economically rejecting society. Some Eritrean women marry early simply to avoid the national service.” [45]

See also [National service in practice](#).

Protection

- 21.21 A United Nations Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review report (summary of stakeholders submissions) on Eritrea, dated 15 September 2009, stated that:

“SRI [Sexual Rights Initiative NGO] stated that the Government has taken a firm public stance against domestic violence, especially wife beating, which is widespread and that marital rape is not categorically outlawed in Eritrea...while noting that overall the Government has failed to protect women from violence, SRI recommended that the Government: criminalize marital rape; conduct public awareness-raising campaigns on rape as a crime and empower victims and their families to expose it; amend the necessary legislation so marriage to the victim does not result in charges of rape being dropped...while also duly investigating and punishing those responsible for it and providing assistance to victims.” [73b] (p4)

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

- 21.22 A report submitted by the Sexual Rights Initiative (an association of NGOs including Mulabi, Action Canada, Action India, Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning, and others) to the United Nations Human Rights Council, in December 2009, for the purposes of a Universal Periodic Review, stated:

“The use of contraception is not widespread. Unless their husbands allow it, women have no choice to prevent pregnancy. Abortion is forbidden by Law and Sharia’a in Eritrea and there is no way to find registered clinics offering that practice. For the Eritreans, abortion is a religious sin. If a woman has to abort, she may do it at home - called ‘domestic abortion’ - a practice that doubtless puts her on high risk of death. If she dies, her relatives would never admit the reason of death, so there are no clear records in this regard. The main causes of maternal mortality are the lack of medical assistance, the bad roads which delay access to medical help, and the malnutrition, especially in the villages and towns far from Asmara.” [70]

- 21.23 As regards abortion, a report submitted by the Eritrean government in 2009 to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the purposes of a United Nations Universal Periodic Review, stated that: “Abortion, although still punishable under the penal code, is permitted in situations where a physician certifies that the mother would suffer grave and permanent damage due to severe physical and mental stress, or when the pregnancy has resulted from rape or incest.” [73a]

See also [Human Rights - Introduction](#); [Trafficking - Overview](#); [National service - exemptions](#); [National service in practice](#).

For information about FGM, see [Children - Female Genital Mutilation \(FGM\)](#).

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22. CHILDREN

OVERVIEW

- 22.01 A national report submitted by the Eritrean government in 2009 to the United Nations Human Rights Council [A/HRC/WG.6/6/ERI/1] for the purposes of a United Nations Universal Periodic Review stated:

“The State of Eritrea has various provisions for the protection of children’s rights under its Transitional Civil Code, Transitional Penal Code and the Transitional Criminal Procedure Code.

“The State of Eritrea signed and ratified the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) in August 1994 and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children (ACRWC) in January 2000. Moreover, Eritrea acceded to the CRC optional Protocol on the Sale of children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography as well as CRC optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts in February 2005.” [73a]

- 22.02 The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) ‘State of the World’s Children 2012’ report, published in February 2012, provided the following statistical information about Eritrean children:

UNICEF statistical information	
Children in Eritrea	
Under-5 mortality rate in 2009	55 per 1,000 live births
Infant mortality rate in 2009 (one year of age or younger)	39 per 1,000 live births
Number of births in 2009	185,000
Number of under-5 deaths in 2009	10,000
life expectancy at birth in 2009	60 years
Primary school net enrolment/attendance (%) 2005-2009* (number of children enrolled in or attending primary school, expressed as a percentage of the total number of children of primary school age)	39

*Data refers to the most recent year available during the period specified in the column heading. [52b]

Eritrea was last considered against the UN Convention on Rights of the Child in June 2008. The UN Committee’s concluding comments are found in its report, [The Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention : Convention on the Rights of the Child : concluding observations : Eritrea](#), 23 June 2008. Though dated, officials are recommended to consult this document in addition to the material below considering the position of children.

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BASIC LEGAL INFORMATION

- 22.03 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', published on 24 May 2012, noted that: "The legal minimum age for marriage for both men and women is 18, although religious entities may bless marriages at younger ages." **[3b] (section 6)**. The same report also stated that: "The legal minimum age for employment is 14, although this does not apply to self-employed workers. The minimum age for hazardous work is 18. The law prohibits minors from working in transport industries or working underground, such as in mines and sewers." **[3b] (section 7)**. The Child Soldiers 2008 Global Report stated that the legal voting age in Eritrea is 18 years of age and 18 is also the minimum age for voluntary recruitment into the armed forces. **[8]**

LEGAL RIGHTS

- 22.04 The unimplemented Constitution mentions children specifically in Article 22 in relation to the right to enjoy family life and that "...parents have the right and duty to bring up their children with proper care and affection; and, in turn, children have the right and the duty to respect their parents and to sustain them in their old age." **[41]** (Constitutionnet.org)

Birth registration and citizenship

- 22.05 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', published on 24 May 2012, stated that:

"Citizenship is derived from at least one parent being an Eritrean citizen. Registration of a new birth within the first three months of a child's life requires only a hospital certificate; after three months the parents must present themselves to the local (zoba) authorities with the child and three witnesses. If not registered a child cannot attend school but can receive medical treatment at hospitals. An increasing number of persons registered their children within the three-month period to avoid complications. Persons born abroad to at least one Eritrean parent are considered citizens. Some persons born to Eritrean parents in Eritrea were not able to obtain national identity cards and government services due to government discrimination - for example, members of certain religious groups." **[3b] (section 6)**

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MILITARY SERVICE

- 22.06 The Child Soldiers 2008 Global Report stated that: "The forcible recruitment of under-18s had previously been reported, but there was no recent information due to severe restrictions imposed by the government on access to independent observers." **[8]**. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 'Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-seekers from Eritrea', published on 20 April 2011, stated that: "Although the minimum age for military conscription is 18, forced underage recruitment, particularly of boys, as well as detention and ill-treatment of children have been reported." **[32b] (p16)**. The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', published on 24 May 2012, stated that: "The law prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 into the armed forces; however, in practice younger children were conscripted by their forced

attendance at [the] Sawa military and educational camp. Those who did not attend remain at risk of arrest.” **[3b] (section 6)**

See also [National service – students and conscription](#).

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VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

22.07 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated: “There are no laws against child abuse and no government programs to combat the problem. Physical punishment was widespread and socially accepted...the law criminalizes child prostitution, pornography, and sexual exploitation. The minimum age for consensual sex is 18. There were several known locations in the capital where prostitution, including child prostitution, took place.” **[3b] (section 6)**

22.08 Information on the Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) website (accessed on 2 August 2012), comprising of a compilation of extracts about child-rights issues from reports submitted in connection with the first United Nations Universal Periodic Review and considered at the 6th session of Human Rights Council on 30 November 2009, stated that:

“In 2008, CRC [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child] was concerned over the information that children, including those in high schools, are victims of torture, cruel and degrading treatment by the police and military, in particular children seeking to avoid military service. It requested Eritrea to take effective measures to protect all children from torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment; to investigate and sanction those responsible for having committed abuses; ensure that all child victims of ill-treatment are provided access to physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration as well as compensation.

“In 2008, CRC noted that the provision on corporal punishment in the Transitional Penal Code only applies to children under 15 when endangering gravely their physical and mental health and that ‘reasonable chastisement’ remains permitted. CRC was concerned that corporal punishment was still widely practiced in the home, the schools and other settings.” **[79]**

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Female genital mutilation (FGM)

22.09 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated that:

“The law prohibits FGM. According to reliable sources, the practice of FGM has been largely eliminated in urban areas through the impact of government educational campaigns, but FGM continued among the majority rural population. Before recent campaigns largely eliminated FGM in urban areas, international organizations reported that 95 percent of girls had undergone FGM, and that figure was likely still accurate in rural regions. In the lowlands, infibulations - the most severe form of FGM - was

practiced. The government and other organizations, including the NUEW and the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students, continued to sponsor a variety of education programs that discouraged the practice.” **[3b] (section 6)**

- 22.10 A report published on the No Peace Without Justice (international NGO) website, entitled ‘2007: Eritrea bans female circumcision’, stated that the law making the practice of FGM illegal in Eritrea is Proclamation 158/2007, issued on 4 April 2007. This law stated that:

“(1) Whosoever performs female circumcision shall be punishable with imprisonment of two to three years and a fine of five to ten thousand (5,000.00 to 10,000.00) Nakfa. If female circumcision causes death, imprisonment shall be from five to ten years.
 (2) Whosoever requests, incites or promotes female circumcision by providing tools or by any other means shall be punishable with imprisonment of six months to one year and a fine of three thousand (3,000.00) Nakfa.
 (3) Where the person who performs female circumcision is a member of the medical professions, the penalty shall be aggravated and the court may suspend such an offender from practicing his/her profession for a maximum period of two years.
 (4) Whosoever, knowing that female circumcision is to take place or has taken place, fails, without good cause, to warn or inform, as the case may be, the proper authorities promptly about it, shall be punishable with a fine of up to one thousand (1,000.00) Nakfa.” **[5]**

- 22.11 The BBC News report, ‘Eritrea bans female circumcision’, dated 4 April 2007, provided additional information about the 2007 ban on FGM:

“Eritrea has banned the life-threatening practice of female circumcision, the Eritrean information ministry has said...The move follows a campaign against the practice by the National Union of Eritrean Women, which says more than 90% of Eritrean women are circumcised...female circumcision is a procedure that seriously endangers the health of women, causes them considerable pain and suffering besides threatening their lives,’ the government proclamation said.

““Whosoever requests, incites or promotes female circumcision by providing tools or any other means and whosoever, knowing that female circumcision is to take place or has taken place, fails without good cause, to warn or inform the proper authorities promptly, shall be punishable with a fine and imprisonment,’ it continued.” **[25b]**

- 22.12 There was some variation between sources regarding the percentage of girls who have undergone FGM. The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’ stated that: “Before recent campaigns largely eliminated FGM in urban areas, international organizations reported that 95 percent of girls had undergone FGM, and that figure was likely still accurate in rural regions.” **[3b] (section 6)**. The BBC News report, ‘Eritrea bans female circumcision’, dated 4 April 2007, stated that “...more than 90% of Eritrean women are circumcised.” **[25b]**. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) ‘State of the World’s Children 2012’ report, published in February 2012, however, stated that 89 percent of women (aged 15-49) had undergone FGM. **[52b]**
- 22.13 The UNICEF report ‘Commemorating the ban on female genital mutilation in Eritrea’, dated 22 February 2010, stated that:

“In 2007, the Government of Eritrea passed a proclamation banning FGM/C. An intensive, multi-faceted advocacy and mobilization campaign ensued, aiming to change

attitudes among different groups of society - including traditional birth attendants, circumcizers, community elders and religious leaders...despite the ban, much work is still needed to ensure the full elimination of FGM/C in Eritrea, where the practice is still seen by many as an important factor in attaining social acceptance and improving girls' marriage prospects...since the ban, it appears that traditional birth attendants and circumcizers have increasingly dropped the practice and become advocates for change. UNICEF Eritrea's goal is to attain a 30 per cent reduction in the practice of FGM/C by 2011." [52c]

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Child labour

- 22.14 The United States Department of Labour '2010 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor' report, published on 30 September 2011, stated that:

"Children in Eritrea are engaged in the worst forms of child labor, many of them in agriculture and domestic service. Children in rural areas of Eritrea work on farms producing corn, wheat, sorghum and other grains and in fields gathering firewood, hauling water and herding livestock. Children's work in agriculture commonly involves dangerous activities such as using dangerous machinery and tools, carrying heavy loads and applying harmful pesticides. Children also work in domestic service, which may involve risks such as sexual abuse and other forms of abuse.

"In urban areas, children transport loads and work on the streets as vendors and car washers. Children also work in garages and workshops making household utensils and furniture, which may require them to use dangerous machinery. In Asmara, some children engage in commercial sexual exploitation and street begging. Children working on the streets may be exposed to multiple dangers, including severe weather, vehicle accidents and criminal elements.

"The Government of Eritrea imposes compulsory labor on secondary-level schoolchildren. Children in the ninth grade and above are forced to work for 2 months during the school break for Mahtot - a national program in which children may be required to build and maintain roads, install power and telephone lines, work as domestic servants and engage in agriculture work such as picking cotton." [42] (p270)

- 22.15 As regards laws and legal protections that relate to child labour, the United States Department of Labour '2010 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor' report stated that:

"The Labor Proclamation sets the minimum age for employment at 14 and the minimum age for hazardous work at 18. Under this law, hazardous work includes transporting goods and passengers; heavy lifting; working with toxic chemicals and dangerous machines; digging tunnels; and working underground in mines, quarries and sewers. However, the Labor Proclamation does not require employers to keep a register containing the name, age or date of birth of their employees, and it does not include penalties for employers of children in hazardous work or children under the minimum age. Further, the Government does not provide protection for selfemployed children or children working without a contract, leaving many children working on the streets, in family businesses and as unprotected child domestics. Children in apprenticeships may

engage in hazardous work if supervised by a competent authority. This includes dangerous and health-threatening tasks such as working in mines, quarries and sewers. It is unclear at what age a child may become an apprentice.

“Slavery, servitude and forced labor are prohibited by the Constitution. The Penal Code prohibits and provides penalties for trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation, child rape and child prostitution. No law prohibits trafficking for labor exploitation. Children under 18 are prohibited from recruitment into the armed forces by Proclamation 11/1991. However, in practice, children under age 18 receive military training.”

[42] (p271)

- 22.16 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated that:

“Labor inspectors from the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare are responsible for enforcing child labor laws; however, laws were not enforced. Inspections, if conducted at all, were infrequent; and penalties, if imposed, were arbitrary. Although the government had a national plan of action to protect children from exploitation in the workplace, it was not enforced, and the government refused to provide information on what actions it was taking to protect children from exploitation.

“The Ministry of Education continued mahtot, a national program by which schools designate students from ninth, 10th, and 11th grades to participate in summer work programs. News reports from state-run media indicated that these students engaged in various activities such as environmental conservation, road construction and maintenance, production and maintenance of school furniture, and laying power lines/telephone cables. In addition, the government requires all secondary school students to complete 12th grade at the Sawa military and educational camp.

“Children were engaged in child labor, including the worst forms of child labor, many of them in agriculture, domestic service, and automotive repair; however, data on the extent of child labor was not available. Children in rural areas assisted with farming, fetched firewood and water, and herded livestock. In urban areas children worked in small-scale manufacturing, car and bicycle repair shops, tea and coffee shops, or the transportation of grain and other goods via donkey carts. Some children worked in the streets cleaning cars or selling cigarettes, newspapers, or chewing gum. Begging and prostitution among children in Asmara also occurred. Persons who fled the country reported that police arrested children and forced them into military service and other forms of national service despite their being younger than the minimum working age.”

[3b] (section 7)

See also [National service – students and conscription](#).

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Sexual abuse

- 22.17 The World Organisation Against Torture report, ‘Violence against Girls in Eritrea - a report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child’, dated 7 July 2004, stated:

“Article 594-599 of the Eritrean Penal Code provides harsh penalties for sexual acts involving children. However, these punishments are rarely exercised because such crimes are seldom reported.

“There is a lack of information concerning sexual abuse and incest within the family...girl sex workers are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and abuse. Additionally, because they are ostracized by society, they are susceptible to psychological harm and stunted development. With very few child sex workers being aware of the need for contraception, they are also at extreme risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.” **[71] (pages 209-210)**

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EDUCATION

22.18 Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012, stated that:

“Education is provided free of charge in government schools and at the University of Asmara. There are also some fee-paying private schools. Education is officially compulsory for children between seven and 13 years of age. Primary education begins at the age of seven and lasts for five years. Secondary education, beginning at 12 years of age, lasts for up to six years, comprising a first cycle of two years and a second of four years.” **[24] (Society and Media)**. An Awate report, ‘Education not Incarceration: Build Schools not Prisons’, dated 4 June 2010, stated that the University of Asmara was closed down in 2006. **[27I]**

22.19 The UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) ‘State of the World’s Children 2012’ report, published in February 2012, stated that the primary school gross enrolment ratio (number of children, regardless of age, enrolled in primary school, expressed as a percentage of the total number of children of official primary school age) in the 2007-2010 period was 53 for males and 44 for females. **[52b]**

22.20 The United States State Department ‘2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea’, published on 24 May 2012, stated that:

“Education through grade seven is compulsory and tuition-free; however, students were responsible for uniforms, supplies, and transportation, which were prohibitively expensive for many families. Education above grade seven required a nominal fee and was not compulsory. There was a shortage of schools and teachers at all levels. Schools have two shifts, which reduces the amount of teaching time per student. Three students often have to share a single chair. In rural areas young girls usually discontinued school early to work at home.” **[3b] (section 6)**

22.21 The Eritrean Ministry of Information (Shabait) report, ‘Eritrea: Institutions of Higher Education Making Due Contribution in Building Human Capacity’, dated 11 March 2009, stated:

“The Executive Director of the National Board for Higher Education, Dr. Tadesse Mehari, said that the expansion of colleges of higher education in all the administrative regions has become a cornerstone in developing competent manpower.

“He said that the University of Asmara that was the sole institution of higher learning in the country used to enroll only about 1,000 students. At present, however, tens of thousands of students have become beneficiaries of higher education thanks to the opening of a number of colleges across the nation.

“Dr. Tadesse further noted that the colleges opened over the past couple of years include the Eritrean Institute of Technology in Mai Nefhi, the Hamelmalo Agricultural College, the College of Health Sciences, the Orotta School of Medicine, the College of Marine Science and Technology, the College of Business and Economics as well as the College of Arts and Social Science. To-date, a total of 3,000 students have graduated in degree and diploma from the newly opened institutions of higher education, he added.”
[46c]

- 22.22 A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, ‘Assessing Progress in Africa toward the Millennium Development Goals’ (MDG Report 2012), published on 15 July 2012, noted that: “The Eritrean government has in fact invested heavily in education, expanding access across the country. It is promoting a new class of trained youths who have disciplined minds and skills to act as teachers and to address the educational deficit, especially at the primary level. The government has established some eight colleges at tertiary level quickly, with new curricula, appropriate to immediate national needs.” [80] (p27)

See also [National service – students and conscription](#).

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HEALTH AND WELFARE

- 22.23 The UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) ‘State of the World’s Children 2012’ report, published in February 2012, provided the following statistical information about the health of Eritrean children:

UNICEF statistical information - health of children in Eritrea	
percentage of one-year-old children immunised against tuberculosis (2010)	99
percentage of one-year-old children who have received their first dose of diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus vaccine (2010)	99
percentage of one-year-old children who have received three doses of diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus vaccine (2010)	99
percentage of one-year-old children who have received three doses of polio vaccine (2010)	99
percentage of one-year-old children immunised against measles (2010)	99
percentage of one-year-old children who have received three doses of hepatitis B vaccine (2010)	99
percentage of one-year-old children who have received three doses of haemophilus type b vaccine (2010)	99
percentage of new-borns protected against tetanus (2010)	93
percentage of children under five years old with diarrhoea receiving oral rehydration and continued feeding 2006-2010*	54x
percentage of children under five years old with fever receiving anti-malarial drugs 2006-2010*	13

* Data refers to the most recent year available during the period specified

x Data refers to years or periods other than those specified; differ from the standard definition, or refer to only part of a country. **[52b]**

- 22.24 A Shaebia (People's Front for Democracy and Justice website) article entitled 'Eritrea's Significant Achievement in Child Health', dated 10 December 2008, stated:

"Eritrea is one of the few third world countries that are expected to achieve the Millennium Development Goals on the health sector in general and child health in particular. The country has registered remarkable progress in child mortality rate over the last 17 years...while African children's health care situation is at a low level, Eritrea has given a good lesson to the rest of the continent. Eritrea reduced child death rate by

50 percent and that makes it one of the few countries on track for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

“According to the report of the Ministry of Health, the achievement is attributed to regular vaccination, public campaigns, dedication of health workers, high community participation, and above all the political commitment of the country. Consequently, Eritrean children are now free from polio, measles, tetanus and the malaria mortality rate has also dropped dramatically over the last few years.

“Community based child health care, one of the most effective measures, was established in 2005 in 17 villages, and in 2007 it reached 63. These centers played an important role in the provision of health services to remote areas of the country where the majority of the people live.” [44a]

- 22.25 The UNDP [United Nations Development Programme], ‘Assessing Progress in Africa toward the Millennium Development Goals’ (MDG Report 2012), published on 15 July 2012, noted that Eritrea was amongst “the best performing countries” for reducing child mortality, with a 51.7 per cent reduction between 1990 and 2010. [80] (p57, p62)

See also [Human Rights - Introduction](#); [Trafficking - Overview](#); [Medical Issues](#); and [Students and conscription](#).

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23. TRAFFICKING

OVERVIEW

- 23.01 The United States State Department ‘Trafficking in Persons Report 2012’, published on 19 June 2012, stated that:

“Eritrea is a source country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and, to a lesser extent, sex trafficking. During the reporting period, forced labor occurred in Eritrea, particularly due to the country’s national service program...each year, tens of thousands of Eritrean workers migrate in search of work, particularly to the Gulf States and Egypt, where some become victims of forced labor, primarily in domestic servitude. Smaller numbers of Eritrean women and girls are subjected to sex trafficking inside the country and potentially in Gulf countries.” [3d] (Eritrea)

GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO TACKLE TRAFFICKING

- 23.02 The United States State Department ‘Trafficking in Persons Report 2012’ stated:

“The Government of the State of Eritrea does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. The Eritrean government does not operate with transparency and did not publish data or statistics regarding any effort to combat human trafficking; it did not respond to requests to provide information for this report...the Government of the State of Eritrea made no known progress in prosecuting and punishing trafficking crimes over the reporting period. Article 605 of the Eritrean Transitional Criminal Code prohibits trafficking in women and young persons for sexual exploitation, which is punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment, or from three to 10 years’ imprisonment if aggravating

circumstances are present; these penalties are sufficiently stringent, but not commensurate with punishments prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Article 565 prohibits enslavement and prescribes punishment of five to 20 years' imprisonment, penalties which are sufficiently stringent. Forced labor and slavery are prohibited, except where authorized by law under Article 16 of the ratified, but suspended, Eritrean Constitution. Proclamation 11/199 prohibits the recruitment of children younger than 18 years of age into the armed forces. Though the penalties are sufficiently stringent, the government has never used these statutes to prosecute cases of human trafficking. The government did not publish information on its investigations or prosecutions, if any, of human trafficking offenses during the reporting period. Eritrea similarly did not report any law enforcement efforts against official complicity in trafficking offenses, such as the use of forced labor to build personal homes or for other personal gain of military officers and government officials...the government provided no known training to its law enforcement on identifying and responding to trafficking crimes." [3d] (Eritrea)

See also [Human Rights - Introduction](#); [Children](#); [Women](#).

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24. MEDICAL ISSUES

OVERVIEW OF AVAILABILITY OF MEDICAL TREATMENT AND DRUGS

24.01 The Globalsurance website, accessed on 7 June 2012, provided the following, undated, information:

"Eritrea is a relatively young country, with an infrastructure which is slowly improving after years of war; there has been a significant improvement in Eritrea's healthcare system, but it still remains very limited. Eritrea's government has been working closely with international aid agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) to improve the health sector in the country as well as the lives of Eritrean citizens.

"The government of Eritrea provides citizens of the country with free public healthcare. It estimated that approximately 37% of the population live below the poverty line - access to free public healthcare is vital for one of the poorest countries in the world.

"The capital of Eritrea - Asmara - is home to four hospitals; three publicly run and one privately run hospital. Public healthcare facilities in the country are relatively poorly equipped, including those in the capital Asmara. However, outside the capital and larger towns, healthcare facilities become even more limited.

"Eritrea healthcare infrastructure currently consists of 25 hospitals, 52 healthcare centres, 180 health stations and 113 clinics. Private healthcare is very expensive in Eritrea, making it inaccessible to many Eritrean citizens. The Ministry of Health (MoH) is responsible for governing the healthcare system in the country. The MoH has made considerable advances in improving access to healthcare for the Eritrean population since it gained independence in 1993, with a focus on gradual decentralization as regional healthcare providers become more self reliant.

“The Eritrean healthcare sector is comprised of three levels. The primary level is first point of health contact - normally small health units - managed by registered nurses with a focus on preventative care, immunization, control and care of communicable disease and health education. Secondary level care includes first-contact hospitals at the local level - known as sub zoba hospitals - providing general medical services, obstetric care, basic laboratory support services and provision of basic surgical procedures. The tertiary level consist of the national referral hospital based in the capital Asmara - Orotta National Referral Hospital - and serves the whole Eritrean population with specialized medical and surgical needs. The Ministry of Health in Eritrea - with the support of international organizations - such as the World Bank plans to strengthen the healthcare system in the country, including provision of medical professionals. There is little known about the Eritrean private healthcare sector, but a World Bank report identified drug procurement and distribution as key functions - primarily in urban areas. Also, a large number of public healthcare workers supplement their incomes by providing dedicated medical services to wealthier Eritrean citizens. There is one private hospital in the capital Asmara - the Sembel Poly Hospital - providing healthcare to wealthy Eritrean citizens and foreign visitors.

“There are still many issues surrounding accessibility of healthcare in Eritrea. Citizens of Eritrea - living in rural and remote areas - have very limited access to healthcare. The capital Asmara and larger towns - with significant population levels - obtaining the benefit of the more comprehensive medical care facilities in Eritrea. Many Eritreans will only seek conventional healthcare treatment when illness becomes serious; the promotion of healthcare in Eritrea - to ensure citizens seek medical aid when required - has been a focus for the MoH.” [34]

- 24.02 The AmeriCares (NGO) website, accessed on 28 January 2011, provided the following information about Eritrean health services:

“Ninety percent of the country's 5 million people are allowed to access free medical treatment at public hospitals and clinics.

“However, Eritrea has only one doctor per 10,000 people and most health care providers are located in urban areas. With 80% of the country's population living in rural areas, it is much harder to access health care or travel to urban health facilities. The lack of access to medical care leads to needless deaths in patients with treatable illnesses, new mothers and children under the age of 5.

“Strengthening the public health system is a priority. In recent years, significant investments have been made and several new hospitals and teaching facilities were opened to reach medically underserved communities.” [69]

- 24.03 The pacificprime website (health insurance company), accessed on 7 June 2012, provided the following, undated, information:

“Despite the fact that the Government has tried to improve the healthcare system in Eritrea, the overall standard is generally poor. In Eritrea, about 90% of the country's population is entitled to access free medical treatment at public hospitals and clinics. The doctor to patient ratio in Eritrea is low, about 1:10,000 people and most healthcare providers are mainly located in urban areas. About 80% of the country's populations are living in the rural areas, which mean that many people will need to travel to urban areas in order to have access to healthcare facilities; this makes it difficult for people living in the rural sections of Eritrea. The lack of access to medical care in the rural areas may

result in delayed treatments or leading to needless deaths in patients. Private doctors and clinics are also available in the country and there is even a private hospital in the capital city, however, the private healthcare sector is relatively small as the charges for service are very expensive and only limited group of people in the country can access private medical services due to the majority of the population living below the poverty line.

“Healthcare facilities in Eritrea include healthcare centres and hospitals. Medical centres provide preliminary medical aid and minor surgical assistance, as well as carrying out diagnostic functions. Except in the case of an emergency, patients are required to make an appointment with the doctor in order to admit into a hospital. Some of the services that patients can find in the hospitals include gynecology, pediatrics and eye care.

“In general, the infrastructure of the healthcare system in Eritrea is far from meeting the standard of western countries. The modern medical facilities are not always available and they are mostly limited to the urban areas in the country. Chemists and drugstores are available in major towns; however, qualifications of chemists are often unknown. Basic non-prescription medicines can be found in major cities, though the selection is not large, and the supply of medicines is often irregular.” [23]

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HIV/AIDS – ANTI-RETROVIRAL TREATMENT

- 24.04 The Eritrean Ministry of Information (Shabait) report, ‘Relentless Endeavors Underway to Prevent HIV/Aids Infection’, dated 22 December 2009, stated that:

“The number of visitors of the voluntary HIV/AIDS blood testing and counseling service is on the rise which in turn contributed to the reduction of HIV infection, stated Dr. Andeberhan Tesfatsion, director of HIV/AIDS and TB in the Ministry of Health.

“In a meeting held at Hotel Asmara Palace, he commended the encouraging endeavors of all institutions and partners in preventing the spread of the infection and uprooting the discriminatory attitude of the society towards persons living with HIV/AIDS.

“Dr. Andeberhan further pointed out that the Government is working diligently in introducing age prolonging medicine (ART- Antiretroviral Therapy) and distributing it to people living with HIV/AIDS free of charge, and thereby enable [sic] them become productive.

“He explained that although the spread of HIV/AIDS is at its lowest level in Eritrea compared to other countries in the region, concerted action is nonetheless needed as the country is located in high-risk zone.” [46b]

- 24.05 A Eritrean Ministry of Information (Shabait) report, ‘HIV/Aids Keeps on Declining’, dated 1 December 2010, stated that:

“The spread of HIV/AIDS infection in Eritrea continues to decline, stated Dr Andeberhan Tesfatsion, director of national HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis control department in the Health Ministry.

“In an interview he conducted with ERINA [Eritrean News Agency] in connection with World AIDS Day, he pointed out that the infection is declining from year to year thanks to the campaign being undertaken to raise societal awareness.

“Dr Andeberhan further indicated that the Government is disbursing 8 million to 10 million Nakfa annually for providing medical care to nationals living with HIV/AIDS so as to enable them [to] become productive. He went on to say that concerted action is also being taken to help them organize in the Bidho HIV/AIDS Association so that they may obtain psychological and medical advice, besides securing financial support.

“Noting that the Ministry has been working diligently through mapping out a 5-year work program for the period 2008 to 2012, Dr Andeberhan said that strenuous efforts are being exerted to raise public awareness to the highest level and reducing the infection to the lowest level possible.” **[46e]**

24.06 The Medical Advisor’s Office (BMA) of the Netherlands Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Immigration & Naturalisation Service, stated in a response provided through the MedCOI service (European Commission-funded project to share medical information in countries of origin) on 22 March 2012 that the following facilities were available in a private hospital in Asmara:

- Outpatient treatment and follow up by an internal specialist
- Inpatient/clinical treatment by an internal specialist
- Laboratory check up of CD4 count
- Laboratory check up of viral load. **[81a]**

24.07 The same response noted that the following anti-retrovirals were available at that time at the same hospital:

Nucleoside/nucleotide reverse transcriptase inhibitors:

- zidovudine
- lamivudine
- abacavir
- emtricitabine
- zalcitabine
- tenofovir
- didanosine
- stavudine

Combinations:

- efavirenz+ emtricitabine+tenofovir (=atrilpa)
- zidovudine+lamivudine (=combivir)

Non- nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors;

- Efavirenz
- Nevirapine

Protease inhibitors:

- indinavir
- saquinavir mesylate
- lopinavir/ritonavir (=kaletra). **[81a]**

24.08 The same response noted that the following were not available at that hospital at that time:

Combinations:

- abacavir+ lamivudine (=epzicom)
- abacavir+ zidovudine+ lamivudine (=trizivir)
- tenofovir+ emtricitabine (=truvada)

Non- nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors;

- Delavirdine

Protease inhibitors:

- amprenavir
- tipranavir
- fosamprenavir

Entry fusion inhibitors:

- enfuvirtide. **[81a]**

24.09 A further response, dated 23 April 2012, stated that darunavir and ritonavir were not known to be available in Eritrea at that time. **[81b]**

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MENTAL HEALTH

24.10 Regarding mental health care in Eritrea, the World Health Organization (WHO) 'Mental Health Atlas', published in 2005, stated that although a mental health policy was devised in 1997, there is no specific mental health legislation other than provisions in the Penal Code; there is no national mental health programme, nor budget allocations for mental health. **[22] (pages 1-2)**. On actual provision, the WHO Mental Health Atlas stated that "mental health is a part of the primary health care system. Actual treatment of severe mental disorders is available at the primary level. Severe mental disorders are primarily treated at the tertiary level (at St Mary's Psychiatric Hospital). However, limited care is available at secondary and primary levels." **[22] (p2)**. The WHO Mental Health Atlas 2005 noted that phenobarbital, chlorpromazine, and diazepam are available at the primary health care level. **[22] (p3)**

See also [Overview of availability of medical treatment and drugs](#).

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25. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

25.01 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', published on 24 May 2012, stated that:

"The law and unimplemented constitution provide for freedom of movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation; however, the government restricted all of these rights in practice. For example, citizens participating in national service were often denied internal travel permits, passports, and exit visas unless they received special privileges or paid bribes...citizens require government permission for most travel within the country and to change their places of residence. The government severely restricts travel to the border regions and even bans bus services to certain towns near the border with Ethiopia.

“Military police periodically set up surprise checkpoints in Asmara and on roads between cities to find draft evaders and deserters. Police also stopped persons on the street and detained those who were unable to present identification documents or movement papers showing they had permission to be in that area...the government severely restricted foreign travel and continually modified its requirements to obtain passports and exit visas, sometimes suspending passport or exit visa services without warning. The prohibitive cost of passports deters many citizens from foreign travel. It costs a citizen in national service the equivalent of 40 percent of his or her gross yearly salary to obtain a valid passport. Some persons previously issued passports were not allowed to renew them, nor were they granted exit visas...in general citizens had the right to return. However, citizens residing abroad had to show proof that they paid the 2 percent tax on foreign earned income to be eligible for some government services, including exit visas for future departures from the country. If the applicant had broken a law abroad, contracted a serious contagious disease, or was declared ineligible for political asylum by other governments, his or her application to return to the country was considered on a case-by-case basis.” **[3b] (section 2d)**

- 25.02 The Human Rights Watch ‘Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription Eritrea’ report, published on 16 April 2009, stated:

“Severe restrictions on freedom of movement are in place. As more and more of its citizens leave the country, the government’s methods to try and stem the exodus have become more brutal...within Eritrea, movement is equally circumscribed through a variety of mechanisms...a visitor to Eritrea in late 2008 described buses being frequently stopped and passengers asked for ID cards: some possessed laminated cards showing that they had completed national service, others had letters authorizing travel to a specific place and for a limited period of time.” **[29c] (p62-63)**

- 25.03 The agreed minutes of a presentation by Dr David Bozzini given on 16 February 2012, entitled ‘National Service and State Structures in Eritrea’, noted that:

“Police control is enforced through the control of identity documents at checkpoints and by police or military police who carry out regular roundups...since the border war with Ethiopia (1998-2000), military conscripts need only a laissez-passers (and no ID card) to pass check-points.

“Conscripts in both sectors of the National Service hold laissez-passers (Mānqāsaqāsi), which are issued by the Ministry of Defense (for the military sector) or another ministry or civil institution under which the conscript is assigned...demobilization cards are issued to National Service members who have successfully carried out the demobilization process. This card replaces laissez-passers. It generally grants more freedom of movement within the Eritrean territory.” **[82] (p6)**

- 25.04 The same document noted that:

“Until autumn 2011, movement on Eritrean roads was controlled by many checkpoints. At these checkpoints, only laissez-passers were checked with no cross-checking other identity documents such as ID cards. It was never verified, if a laissez-passers really belonged to the person who was using it. Deserters using documents of friends or falsified documents were thus almost never detected. Nevertheless, the controls were responsible for a climate of fear and incertitude.” **[82a] (p7)**

- 25.05 The British Embassy in Asmara, in a letter dated 10 August 2010 (Annex F), provided the following information, obtained from Eritrean sources:

“Travel permits are required to travel anywhere in Eritrea, travel to border areas is not permitted. They are issued by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), the Demobilisation Commission and other local administration offices. The format is not standard, for those who have completed their national service, they can travel using their ID Card and their demobilisation papers. If issued by the MOD, the travel permit contains: full name, date of travel, expiry date of permit and where travelling to and from. The demobilisation paper contains: full name, military number, date of birth, national service details and a photograph of the holder. Anyone found trying to leave without the necessary permit or demobilisation paper will be detained until they can prove they have completed their national service. Those who have not reported for national service will be detained as deserters and sent to a military training camp. ID cards are compulsory for anyone over the age of 18. They are issued by the Department of Immigration and Nationality in a standard format. They contain: full name, date of birth, place of birth, address and a photograph of the holder. ID cards need to be carried at all times. If found not to be in possession of an ID card, individuals will be detained until such time as one can be produced. They rely on friends or guards to inform their family of their detention.”

See also [Round-ups \('Giffas'\)](#) and [Exit and return](#).

- 25.06 Foreign nationals in Asmara need permission to travel outside the city, as noted in the 'Travel Advice', section of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website, updated on 23 April 2012:

“All foreign nationals are required to have a travel permit to leave Asmara. Those working outside Asmara are also required to have a travel permit to leave their area of residence or work. Applications for such travel permits in Asmara are handled by the relevant Ministry. For business travellers, applications are dealt with by the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Applications outside Asmara are handled by the local Zoba (Region) Administration Offices. Permission may take several days to be granted and is sometimes refused or delayed. Tourists seeking to travel outside Asmara should apply for travel permits at the Ministry of Tourism located on Harnet Avenue in Asmara. Such permits usually take around 24 hours to process. There is no guarantee that permits will be issued.

“Foreign diplomats were told in February 2011 that they would not be issued with travel permits until further notice. Staff from the British Embassy are therefore unlikely to be able to offer any consular assistance to British nationals outside Asmara.” **[10b]**

- 25.07 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', stated the following regarding the freedom of movement of foreigners:

“Travel restrictions imposed in 2006 on noncitizens remained in effect. All diplomats, humanitarian organizations, UN staff, and foreign tourists were required to obtain advance permission from the government to leave Asmara. Travel restrictions were enforced at military checkpoints. Securing travel permission was not a transparent process. While some foreign nationals obtained permission to travel to certain locations, the government refused to issue travel permits to others traveling to the same place. The government often failed to respond to requests for travel authorization.”

[3b] (section 2d)

26. CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALITY

- 26.01 The legal requirements for Eritrean nationality are set out in Eritrean Nationality Proclamation 21/1992, which became law on 6 April 1992. Eritrean nationality can be acquired through birth, adoption, naturalisation, and marriage. Dual nationality is not allowed. The Proclamation also contains provisions that allow citizenship to be rescinded. **[2] (Eritrean Nationality Proclamation 21/1992)**
- 26.02 Article 2 of the Nationality Proclamation relates to birth in Eritrea and states that:
- “1. Any person born to a father or a mother of Eritrean origin in Eritrea or abroad is an Eritrean national by birth.
- “2. A person who has ‘Eritrean origin’ is any person who was resident in Eritrea in 1933.
- “3. A person born in Eritrea of unknown parents shall be considered an Eritrean national by birth until proven otherwise.
- “4. Any person who is an Eritrean by origin or by birth shall, upon application, be given a certificate of nationality by the Department of Internal Affairs.
- “5. Any person who is Eritrean by birth, resides abroad and possesses foreign nationality shall apply to the Department of Internal Affairs if he wishes to officially renounce his foreign nationality and acquire Eritrean nationality or wishes, after providing adequate justification, to have his Eritrean nationality accepted while maintaining his foreign nationality.” **[2] (Eritrean Nationality Proclamation 21/1992)**
- 26.03 Article 3 of the Nationality Proclamation relates to individuals who were born abroad and entered and resided in Eritrea between 1934 and 1951 and states that:
- “1. Eritrean nationality is hereby granted to any person who is not of Eritrean origin and who entered, and resided in, Eritrea between the beginning of 1934 and the end of 1951, provided that he has not committed anti-people acts during the liberation struggle of the Eritrean people. He shall, upon application, be given a certificate of nationality by the Department of Internal Affairs, provided that he has not rejected Eritrean nationality. The provisions of article 2(5) of this Proclamation shall apply when such a person possesses the nationality of another country.
- “2. Any person born to a person mentioned in sub-article 1 of this article is Eritrean by birth. The Department of Internal Affairs shall, upon his application, issue him a certificate of nationality.
- “3. The Department of Internal Affairs shall revoke the nationality of any person mentioned in sub-article 1 of this article where it determines that he had acquired Eritrean nationality or the certificate of Eritrean nationality by fraud, deceit or concealment of decisive facts.” **[2] (Eritrean Nationality Proclamation 21/1992)**
- 26.04 Article 4 of the Nationality Proclamation relates to individuals who were born abroad and entered and resided in Eritrea in 1952 or thereafter and states that:

“1. Any person who is not of Eritrean origin and has entered, and resided in, Eritrea in 1952 or after shall apply for Eritrean nationality to the Secretary of Internal Affairs.

“2. The Secretary of Internal Affairs shall grant Nationality by Naturalization to the person mentioned in sub-article 1 of this article provided that the person:

a) has entered Eritrea legally and has been domiciled in Eritrea for a period of ten (10) years before 1974 or has been domiciled in Eritrea for a period of twenty (20) years while making periodic visits abroad;

b) possesses high integrity and has not been convicted of any crime;

c) understands and speaks one of the languages of Eritrea;

d) is free of any of the mental or physical handicaps mentioned in article 339-340 of the Transitory Civil Code of Eritrea, will not become a burden to Eritrean society and can provide for his own and his family's needs;

e) has renounced the nationality of another country, pursuant to the legislation of that country;

f) has decided to be permanently domiciled in Eritrea upon the granting of his Eritrean nationality;

g) has not committed anti-people acts during the liberation struggle of the Eritrean people.

“3. A person shall be granted Eritrean Nationality by Naturalization and given a certificate of nationality pursuant to sub-article 2 of this article only after he signs the oath of allegiance attached to, and is part of, this Proclamation before the Secretary of Internal Affairs or any other official designated by him. Eritrean nationality granted pursuant to article 4 of this Proclamation shall be proclaimed in the Gazette of Eritrean Laws.

“4. A person given a certificate of Eritrean nationality pursuant to sub-article 2 of this article shall acquire the status of a Naturalized Eritrean national as of the date of receipt of the certificate.

“5. The Secretary of Internal Affairs may cause the name of any offspring on whose behalf an application has been made by a person responsible for him under the law and who has been granted Eritrean Nationality by Naturalization to be included in the certificate of nationality of the applying person. The minor offspring shall acquire the status of a naturalized national as of the date of the inclusion of his name.

“6. Any person born to a naturalized Eritrean national pursuant to article 4 of this Proclamation after the person has been granted the status of a Naturalized National becomes an Eritrean by birth.” **[2] (Eritrean Nationality Proclamation 21/1992)**

26.05 Article 5 of the Nationality Proclamation relates to obtaining nationality by adoption and states that: “The Secretary of Internal Affairs shall grant Eritrean Nationality by Naturalization and issue a certificate of nationality to a person adopted legally by, and upon the application of, an Eritrean national by birth or by Naturalization or by the adopted person himself.” **[2] (Eritrean Nationality Proclamation 21/1992)**

26.06 Article 6 of the Nationality Proclamation relates to obtaining nationality through marriage and states that:

“1. Any person of non-Eritrean origin who is legally married to an Eritrean national by birth or to a person granted Eritrean Nationality by Naturalization shall be granted Eritrean Nationality by Naturalization when such a person applies to the Secretary of Internal Affairs, provided that the person:

- a) has lived in Eritrea with the spouse for at least three (3) years;
- b) has renounced his foreign nationality and is prepared to acquire Eritrean nationality;
- c) signs an oath of allegiance pursuant to article 4(3).

“2. A person who had been granted Eritrean nationality by reason of marriage shall be deprived of his nationality by the Secretary of Internal Affairs where such a person chooses to re-acquire his original nationality upon the death of the spouse or by divorce or when the marriage is declared null and void by a court of law.”

[2] (Eritrean Nationality Proclamation 21/1992)

26.07 Article 8 of the Nationality Proclamation relates to the deprivation of nationality and states that:

“1. A committee composed of the Secretaries of Justice, Internal Affairs and Public Administration may deprive of his nationality an Eritrean national by birth or an Eritrean granted Nationality by Naturalization pursuant to article 4 hereof, who has attained the age of eighteen and has capacity under the law where such a person:

- a) voluntarily acquires a foreign nationality after the publication of this Proclamation; or
- b) officially renounces his Eritrean nationality; or
- c) signs an oath of allegiance of another country after the publication of this Proclamation; or
- d) in violation of an explicit provision of Eritrean law, serves or continues to serve another country; or
- e) is condemned for treason by a court of law.

“2. A committee composed of the Secretaries of Justice, Internal Affairs and Public Administration may deprive of his Nationality a person who has been granted Eritrean Nationality by Naturalization (articles 4 to 6) where such a person:

- a) acquires Eritrean nationality or a certificate of nationality by fraud, deceit or concealment of decisive facts; or
- b) is confirmed, that he has, by illegally contacting external powers, committed acts which aided and abetted an enemy;
- c) has committed treason outside Eritrea;
- d) has been indicted for a crime and sentenced to more than five years imprisonment;
- e) has committed any one of the acts enumerated in sub article(I) hereof.

“3. A person shall be deprived of his nationality pursuant to sub-articles (1) and (2) hereof only after the necessary investigation has been conducted and after such a person has been given an opportunity to defend himself.”

[2] (Eritrean Nationality Proclamation 21/1992)

The nationality law, Eritrean Nationality Proclamation 21/1992, can be accessed here: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=3ae6b4e026>.

See also [Religion - Jehovah's Witnesses](#).

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ETHIOPIANS IN ERITREA

- 26.08 The Human Rights Watch report, 'The Horn Of Africa War: Mass Expulsions and the Nationality Issue', published in January 2003, noted that:

“The legal status of Ethiopian residents in Eritrea who had not sought Eritrean nationality at the time of the war's [with Ethiopia] outbreak [in 1998] does not appear to be in dispute. The Eritrean government as a rule considered them as aliens. It did not automatically issue the Eritrean national identity card or passport to these Ethiopians nor did it recruit them for employment reserved for nationals. Ethiopians were also not called up for military service in Eritrea. For the purposes of residency and departure procedures, the Eritrean government continued to deal with Ethiopian nationals under the normal institutions and procedures governing aliens residing in the country, i.e. they were required to acquire residency permits and obtain exit visas to leave the country.”

[29d] (p31)

- 26.09 An International Committee of the Red Cross report, published in August 2009, stated that “...the Eritrean authorities have informed the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that it will no longer be involved in any repatriation of Ethiopians from the country. According to the authorities, this decision was motivated by the unilateral cancellation of two repatriation operations in late 2008 and early 2009 by Ethiopia”. The report further stated that since 2000, more than 43,000 Ethiopian and Eritrean civilians have been repatriated to their respective countries, and that “the decision of the Eritrean authorities to terminate the ICRC's involvement in the repatriations does not affect the right of Ethiopian nationals to leave Eritrea if they wish to do so.” **[47]**

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27. IDENTITY CARDS AND OFFICIAL DOCUMENTATION

- 27.01 The British Embassy in Asmara, in a letter dated 10 August 2010 (Annex F), provided the following information, obtained from Eritrean sources:

“[Identity] ID cards are compulsory for anyone over the age of 18. They are issued by the Department of Immigration and Nationality in a standard format. They contain: full name, date of birth, place of birth, address and a photograph of the holder. ID cards need to be carried at all times. If found not to be in possession of an ID card, individuals will be detained until such time as one can be produced. They rely on friends or guards

to inform their family of their detention...by virtue of Article 51 of the T/Criminal Procedure Code of Eritrea, the police and army are empowered to carry out routine checks on individuals unless the person concerned is a member of the diplomatic community. Individuals have to produce their ID card and demobilisation papers...according to Art 5 of the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF) Civil Law, every People's Congress has the duty and responsibility to organise Civil Status Officers who shall register births, marriages and deaths within its jurisdiction, and are duty-bound to issue certificates on request by any individual, as prescribed under Article 9 of the law. But in practice People's Congresses have not yet been re-established since independence in the spirit of the law. Therefore, registration of births, marriages and deaths is not available except in Asmara. Registration in Asmara has been in practice since the time of Italian colonisation, however, registration is not mandatory for the people - even in Asmara. That said, most people do register births in order to include all family members on their ration cards. There is no central register office where records are held."

- 27.02 The agreed minutes of a presentation by Dr David Bozzini given on 16 February 2012, entitled 'National Service and State Structures in Eritrea', noted that:

"The blue identity card is issued to individuals over 18 years by the Immigration Office, which has branches in all Zobas. For obtaining an ID card, a citizen first has to approach the local administration (Mmhdar), which issues a letter of recommendation for the Immigration Office branch of the Zoba. In preparation for the independence referendum in 1993, millions of ID cards were issued. ID cards are used in all kinds of bureaucratic procedures. Not having an ID card can hinder access to civil services. However, since the border war with Ethiopia (1998-2000), military conscripts need only a laissez-passers (and no ID card) to pass check-points.

"Conscripts in both sectors of the National Service hold laissez-passers (Mänqäsaqäsi), which are issued by the Ministry of Defense (for the military sector) or another ministry or civil institution [sic] under which the conscript is assigned. Military laissez-passers are yellow, and those of civil institutions are white. Not all have the same design and information, some are even simple letters.

"Demobilization cards are issued to National Service members who have successfully carried out the demobilization process. This card replaces laissez-passers. It generally grants more freedom of movement within the Eritrean territory. However, holders of such cards are not properly demobilized. On the contrary, they are still assigned to their position within the state institutions and do not have the right to change or to find a job elsewhere. Usually, Eritreans [sic] do not differ between the National Service period and such demobilization in the sense that the conscript is not released. Many people doubt that they are officially demobilized by the army. Everyone expects to be remobilized in case of a new conflict." [82] (p6)

See also [National service](#).

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28. EXIT AND RETURN

PASSPORT APPLICATIONS

- 28.01 The British Embassy in Asmara, in a letter dated 1 April 2010 (Annex E), provided the following information, obtained from Eritrean sources:

“Individuals working in a government ministry or agency must obtain ministerial permission before applying for a passport. Other individuals must obtain authorisation from a local government administrator and present a birth certificate, any military/national service medical exemption documents, and an ID card. The administrator will then instruct the Department of Immigration (which has offices in regional capitals) to issue a passport. All of the Department of Immigration’s regional offices can issue passports. There is a fee for this service. For some time now, it has been very difficult to obtain first-issue passports. In practice, those individuals who are exempt from military/national service, such as people who are ill or old, as well as government officials who need to travel abroad on official business, will find it easier to obtain passports. Even in these cases, however, there is no guarantee that a passport application will be accepted. Passports, which are due to go biometric at some point, are printed in English, Tigrinya and Arabic.”

- 28.02 The agreed minutes of a presentation by Dr David Bozzini given on 16 February 2012, entitled ‘National Service and State Structures in Eritrea’, noted that:

“Passports cannot be obtained by conscripts and so-called demobilized National Service members who still have the obligation to participate in the Warsay Yikealo campaign. Passports and ID cards can be obtained upon request at Eritrean embassies and consulates abroad. It’s necessary to pay fees, others [sic] taxes and to fill out of a [sic] special form for deserters or objectors that clearly mentions their national felony. At least between 2004 and 2007, au-thentic [sic] passports and exit visas could be obtained through illegal procedures in Eritrea at a high price (40'000/70'000 [sic] Nakfa). However, such opportunity was considerably limited after the police cracked down on a network of offenders in 2005.” [82]

- 28.03 The Awate report, ‘Eritrea Annuls All Passports; Issues New Ones’, dated 19 April 2010, stated that:

“Cash strapped and facing sanctions and asset-freezes, the Government of Eritrea has issued an order to its embassies to annul all Eritrean Passports and to require Eritrean passport-holders to apply for new ones by paying USD \$200 (for expatriates) and Nakfa 3000 for Eritrean residents.

“Unlike the old passports, which were valid for 5 years, the new ones will have to be renewed every 2 years...the decision to reduce the expiration date of the passports from 5 to 2 years will be specially onerous on Eritreans residing in Middle Eastern countries who are required to have valid passports from their native country to secure employment in their host countries. When renewing their passports, they are asked to pay the passport fee, any 2% income tax in arrears (tax on income generated in the host country), as well as any other fee that was imposed by the ruling party (national defense fee, adopt-a-martyr fee, fight-the-sanction-fee, etc.).” [27m]

See [Freedom of Movement](#).

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EXIT VISAS AND ILLEGAL EXIT

- 28.04 The United States State Department '2011 Human Rights Report: Eritrea', published on 24 May 2012, stated that:

"Citizens and some foreign nationals were required to obtain exit visas to depart the country. Persons routinely denied exit visas included men under the age of 54, regardless of whether they had completed national service; women younger than 47; members of Jehovah's Witnesses and other unregistered religious groups; persons who had not completed national service; and other persons out of favor with, or seen as critical of, the government. While not consistently implemented, some relaxation of exit visa requirements took place during the year [2011], allowing an unknown number of persons below the described age cutoffs to leave the country without imposing additional bribes or favors to officials. Some females married more than 10 years and some persons released from national service received exit visas.

"In 2006 the government began refusing to issue exit visas to children 11 years old and older. Increasingly, children of any age were denied exit visas either on the grounds that they were approaching the age of eligibility for national service or because their foreign-based parents had not paid the 2 percent income tax required of all citizens residing abroad. The government did not in general grant exit visas to entire families or both parents of children simultaneously in order to prevent families from fleeing the country. Some citizens were given exit visas only after posting bonds of approximately 150,000 nakfa (\$10,000) or more. Exit visa policies were frequently adjusted in nontransparent ways specifically to benefit the relatives of high-ranking government officials. For example, the government posted notices on current exit visa regulations in nondesignated, inconsistent, and inaccessible locations." **[3b] (section 2d)**

- 28.05 The United States State Department 'International Religious Freedom Report for 2011: Eritrea', published on 30 July 2012, stated that:

"The application for an exit visa requires a designation of religious affiliation, and Christians must also indicate their particular denomination. Members of registered religious groups can often obtain exit visas if they have completed national service requirements and are of retirement age.

"In order to obtain exit visas, members of unregistered religious groups were required to obtain additional permission from the Office of Religious Affairs. The Office of Religious Affairs typically denied exit visas to anyone known to be a member of an unregistered religious group. There were also reports of seemingly arbitrary actions toward members of unregistered religious groups, including immediate arrest. Such actions might be linked to corruption within the office of immigration." **[3c] (section 2)**

- 28.06 The British Embassy in Asmara, in a letter dated 1 April 2010 (Annex E), provided the following information, obtained from Eritrean sources:

"Exit visas used to be issued in sticker form but following a 2009 alleged visa scam are now stamps. They are produced in a standard format, in English only.

"Exit visas are not issued free of charge. The cost is currently around £8 (GBP) for a single exit visa. If government officials are travelling on official business we assume, but cannot confirm, that they do not pay fees.

“Exit visas are issued by the Department of Immigration which has regional offices. All these regional offices have the authority to issue exit visas. Applicants must apply in person only...in practice, the majority of Eritreans wishing to travel abroad are not issued with exit visas and therefore cannot leave the country legally. Government officials and ministers can certainly obtain exit visas provided they have been given authorisation to travel abroad on official business. People who need medical treatment abroad can also obtain exit visas. Businessmen will almost always have to satisfy the age limit. In other words, they would have to be over the age of 57 before they would be allowed to apply for an exit visa. Women are not given preferential treatment or dispensation. For example, we know of many Eritrean women who have undergone military service, or are married and have children, but have still been refused exit visas for bona fide journeys abroad. Religious ministers or clerics can obtain exit visas if they need to travel abroad to attend meetings or events in connection with their religious faith, but they would have to belong to one of the officially recognised religions, such as the Roman Catholic Church...multi-exit visas are not issued. Exit visas are valid for one month and for one journey only.”

- 28.07 The Human Rights Watch report ‘Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea’, published on 16 April 2009, stated:

“Due to the large number of people fleeing or refusing to return after being allowed to leave, exit visas are routinely denied for young people who are eligible for national service. Children from the age of 14 are usually denied exit visas but the US State Department has reported exit visas refused for children as young as five. One older woman who had managed to travel to visit her children abroad described the signs in the Foreign Ministry as saying that only men over the age of 54 and women over 47 are eligible for exit visas, she said, ‘only the old can travel.’” [29c] (p63-64)

- 28.08 The Awate report, ‘A Nation of Fleeing Masses’, dated 21 May 2008, suggested that:

“A small privileged group composed of the children and families of high government officials and ministers as well as of loyal cadres, some in need of specialised medical diagnosis and treatment, are allowed to travel via Asmara Airport and encouraged to acquire permanent residence permits in the West, posing as paperless political asylum seekers. When granted refugee status they travel frequently to Eritrea and remain ardent supporters of the regime from whom they have sought ‘asylum’. Likewise, many of the perpetrators [sic] of human rights violations in Eritrea have their entire families transferred abroad and travel regularly to visit them.” [27h]

- 28.09 The British Embassy in Asmara, in a letter dated 1 April 2010 (Annex E), provided the following information, obtained from Eritrean sources:

“People wishing to travel overseas for medical treatment are required to have a medical certificate provided by a government medical panel. The medical panel is made up of doctors who have the authority to carry out a medical examination on the person concerned. Medical certificates are only issued after a medical examination has been carried out. Depending on the age of the person concerned and severity of the condition, the normal requirement for military/national service exemption papers may be waived. We do not believe that letters from foreign doctors are also required as it is local medical opinion that carries weight in these matters.”

See [Freedom of Movement](#).

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REQUIREMENT TO PAY INCOME TAX

- 28.10 The Human Rights Watch report 'Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea', published on 16 April 2009, stated:

"There are a variety of ways in which the Eritrean government exerts pressure on exiles for both financial and political reasons. The government expects all Eritreans in the diaspora to pay a two percent tax on income. While taxing expatriates may be a legitimate state function, the manner in which the Eritrean government coerces individuals into paying this income [tax] presents serious human rights concerns. If refugees or other Eritrean expatriates do not pay the two percent tax then the government typically punishes family members in Eritrea by arbitrarily detaining them, extorting fines, and denying them the right to do business by revoking licenses or confiscating land.

"The two percent tax is not only a financial mechanism, however. The government also uses it to consolidate its control over the diaspora population by denying politically suspect individuals essential documents such as passports and requiring those who live in Eritrea to provide 'clearance' documents of their relatives who live abroad - essentially coercion to ensure that their relatives have paid the two percent expatriate income tax demanded by the government...one man living in the UK, a known critic of the government, said that his family had been denied land that they had applied for in Eritrea, because of his refusal to pay the tax...clearance is a process whereby an embassy charges a fee to certify that Eritreans living abroad have paid their dues and are up to date with the two percent tax...a woman living in Eritrea described how several of her neighbors had had their business licenses revoked because their children, residents in the United States, had not paid the two percent [tax] and they could not provide clearance certificates.

"Embassies have particular leverage over many Eritrean immigrants and refugees who do not have travel documents, and those whose passports require renewing. A refugee living in Rome had his application for a new passport refused... 'if you don't pay [the tax] they don't renew your passport, with no passport, you have no permit to stay in Italy...so directly or indirectly you are obligated to pay.'" [29c] (p75-76)

See [Freedom of Movement](#).

FAILED ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

- 28.11 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 'Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-seekers from Eritrea', published in April 2009, stated:

"Eritreans who are forcibly returned may, according to several reports, face arrest without charge, detention, ill-treatment, torture or sometimes death at the hands of the authorities. They are reportedly held incommunicado, in over-crowded and unhygienic conditions, with little access to medical care, sometimes for extended periods of time. According to credible sources, 1,200 persons were forcibly returned from Egypt to Eritrea in June 2008, where the majority was detained in military facilities. UNHCR is aware of at least two Eritrean asylum-seekers who have arrived in Sudan having

escaped from detention following deportation from Egypt in June 2008. Eritreans forcibly returned from Malta in 2002 and Libya in 2004 were arrested on arrival in Eritrea and tortured. The returnees were sent to two prisons on Dahlak Island and on the Red Sea coast, where most are still believed to be held incommunicado. There are also unconfirmed reports that some of those returned from Malta were killed. In another case, a rejected asylum-seeker was detained by the Eritrean authorities upon her forcible return from the United Kingdom. On 14 May 2008, German immigration authorities forcibly returned two rejected asylum-seekers to Eritrea. They were reportedly detained at Asmara airport upon arrival and are being held incommunicado, and believed to be at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

“For some Eritreans, being outside the country may be sufficient cause on return to be subjected to scrutiny, reprisals and harsh treatment. Individuals may be suspected of having sought asylum, participating in diaspora-based opposition meetings or otherwise posing a (real or perceived) threat to the Government, particularly where they have exited the country illegally.” [32a]

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29. HUMANITARIAN ISSUES

- 29.01 The Humanitarian Action for Children 2012 Eritrea section of the UNICEF website, undated, accessed on 8 August 2012, stated that:

“Children and women in Eritrea remain vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity resulting from drought and the continued political impasse with neighbouring Ethiopia. UNICEF is taking a lead role in assisting 370,000 children affected by these emergencies within the humanitarian sectors of health, nutrition, and water and sanitation. Despite changes in the level of cooperation between the United Nations and the Government of Eritrea and the limited number of partnerships within the country, UNICEF remains a critical broker between the Government and bilateral donors in improving the well-being of the vulnerable population, especially children and women.

“Although a lack of updated and reliable data on the humanitarian situation remains a challenge, field observations indicate dire humanitarian consequences for children and women due to continuing levels of undernutrition, poor sanitation coverage and physical risks associated with exposure to landmines and unexploded ordnance. Although the cluster approach has not been activated in Eritrea, UNICEF plays a lead role in the nutrition and WASH [water, sanitation and hygiene] sectors and actively participates in the health and child protection sectors.” [52d]

- 29.02 A United Nations IRIN report, ‘Eritrea-Ethiopia: "Silent crisis" as more Eritreans flee’, dated 5 August 2011, stated:

“More and more Eritrean refugees, mostly educated young men, continue to arrive in Ethiopia, with the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, expressing concern over the rising numbers.

“Most say they left their country [to avoid] a prolonged military conscription, but they also say they want to join their families on the road,’ Moses Okello, UNHCR’s representative in Ethiopia, told IRIN.

“Ethiopia hosts at least 61,000 Eritrean refugees.

“UNHCR has described the latest Eritrean refugee influx as a ‘silent crisis’, coming at a time when the Horn of Africa has been gripped by the worst drought in 60 years.

“Okello said those arriving were in good condition compared with thousands of Somali refugees in Ethiopia’s Dolo Ado area in the southeast.

“On average, 1,300 Eritreans leave their country for Ethiopia every month, according to government statistics.

“‘The trend seems non-stop and yet increasing,’ according to Ayalew Aweke, the deputy director of the government’s Administration for Refugees and Returnee Affairs (ARRA).

“Ayalew said: ‘We are receiving additional refugees of between 1,200-1,500 every month. Most of them are unaccompanied youngsters.’

“Disputed numbers

“UNHCR, however, says about 800 to 1,000 Eritreans reached Ethiopian refugee camps in Shimelba, Maiaini and Adi-Harush in Tigray Regional state every month.” [17f]

29.03 A BBC News report, ‘Drought in Eritrea: Hunger despite government denials’, dated 4 September 2011, stated:

“The drought and famine that is devastating the Horn of Africa is affecting more than 12 million people.

“Yet one country in the region, Eritrea, says it has escaped the crisis, reaping a bumper harvest earlier this year.

“But evidence is now mounting that the real situation in the secretive country may be rather different, with up to two in three Eritreans going hungry.

“In the last decade Eritrea has become one of the world’s most closed nations with no free press and no opposition.

“So it has been difficult to verify the Eritrean government’s claims that the population has the food it needs.

“But it has now been possible to piece together an alternative picture from a variety of sources.

“There is an increasing trend of acute malnutrition in children under five in many areas.

“Satellite imagery from weather monitoring group the Famine Early Warning System shows below average rainfall from June to September.

“This is the main rainy season for Eritrea and comes after years of severe drought in consecutive years.

“The human impact is to be found in northern Ethiopia.

“Emaciated Eritreans are crossing the heavily militarised border at the rate of 900 a month, according to journalists in the region.

“They tell tales of crops that have failed and homes without food.” [25n]

- 29.04 An Open Democracy report, ‘Eritrea: the politics of food security’, dated 5 September 2011, stated:

‘In the summer months of 2011, the government in Asmara (via its only media outlet, the ministry of information) regularly announced that there is no food shortage in Eritrea and thus no need for food aid or the kind of emergency attention devoted by international agencies to the rest of the horn of Africa. Its stance - that it is untouched by an emergency affecting 12 million people elsewhere - is reiterated by government ministers in the international media and by Eritreans in the diaspora supportive of the regime of the president, Isaias Afewerki...there had already been sources available that suggested scepticism over the Eritrean government's claims. The Global Hunger Index Report (GHI), released in October 2010, indicates that Eritrea was among the twenty-nine countries whose levels of hunger it considered ‘extremely alarming’. The GHI highlights a key component of crisis, namely the way that a lack of nutrition in early childhood can have a long-term impact on economic performance.

‘The GHI index is compiled from data collected by governments and international agencies. Thus its conclusions regarding Eritrea cannot easily be dismissed - and the fact that several countries where conditions were not in 2010 considered “extremely alarming” (Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda among them) are now seeking assistance has clear implications for conditions in Eritrea. Indeed, Isaias Afewerki had admitted at the end of 2009 - in a meeting with Unicef's deputy executive director, Hilde Johnson, whose content was later publicised - that the country faced severe problems; as a result, Eritrea agreed to give Unicef total access to conduct a nutritional survey, which probably supplied the information included in the GHI...today, even the urban middle classes find themselves scarcely able to purchase the necessities of life amid steep food prices which far exceed their average monthly income. Such basics as milk, domestic cooking fuel, and diesel are so scarce that many people resort routinely to unofficial channels to obtain them, and no longer seek them in the market.

‘Every Eritrean under the age of 50 is supposed to be undertaking compulsory military service, which earns 400 nakfa a month (approximately \$26). This alone wouldn't even cover the price of a single decent meal: for a small chicken costs around 800 nakfa, a small goat or lamb 2,000 nakfa, and local fruits and vegetables on average 80 nakfa/kg. Many families thus sustain themselves on dry bread, which is rationed. Even basic traditional meals prepared from local grains such as chickpeas are now a luxury.’ [31]

- 29.05 A United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service report, ‘International Food Security Assessment, 2012-2022’, published in July 2012, stated:

‘In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Eritrea, and Lesotho, nearly 100 percent of the population is projected to remain food insecure throughout the projection period [2012-2022]...Eritrea and Lesotho have some of the lowest average grain yields in the world. Both countries' agricultural output is characterized by wide swings in output due to rainfall variability. Eritrea's coefficient of variation of grain production during the last

two decades averaged 65 percent; in any given year, production could vary 65 percent above or below trend levels. Eritrea's projected population growth of 2.5 percent per year through 2022 will exacerbate the food security situation.' [84]

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Annex A

CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR EVENTS

Information is taken from Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012, unless stated otherwise. [24]

- 1952** Federation formed between Eritrea and Ethiopia.
[24] (Eritrea - Historical Context)
- 1958** Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM) founded.
[24] (Eritrea - Historical Context)
- 1961** Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) begins armed campaign for Eritrean independence from Ethiopia. [24] (Eritrea - Historical Context)
- 1962** Eritrea's status reduced to that of an Ethiopian province.
[24] (Eritrea - Historical Context)
- 1970** The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) forms.
[11] (About.com - accessed on 1 February 2011)
- 1972-74** Civil war in Eritrea between ELF and breakaway Popular Liberation Forces (which went on to form the Eritrean People's Liberation Front [EPLF] in 1977).
[24] (Eritrea - Historical Context)
- 1974** Revolution brings hard-line Marxist 'Derg' regime to power.
[24] (Eritrea - Historical Context)
- 1977** First conference of the EPLF held. [58] (EHREA website - accessed on 1 February 2011).
- 1977-78** Further splits within ELF. [24] (Eritrea - Historical Context)
- 1990**
February The EPLF captures the port of Massawa from the Ethiopians.
[12b] (www.eritrea.be - accessed on 15 September 2010)
- 1991**
May EPLF captures Asmara; at the same time Eritrean People's Revolutionary Defence Force (EPRDF) captures Addis Ababa and overthrows Derg; EPRDF recognises EPLF as government of Eritrea and agrees independence referendum for Eritrea in 1993. [24] (Eritrea - Historical Context)
- 1993**
April UN-supervised referendum overwhelmingly approves independence from Ethiopia. [24] (Eritrea - Historical Context)
- May** On 24 May, Eritrean independence is proclaimed. On 28 May, Eritrean independence is internationally recognised. The EPLF establishes a transitional government. The leader of the EPLF, Isaias Afewerki becomes the first president of Eritrea. [24] (Eritrea - Historical Context)

- June On 8 June, Isaias Afewerki becomes President of Eritrea.
[48] (Economic Expert - Politics of Eritrea - accessed on 15 September 2010)
- 1994**
February EPLF becomes the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) and espouses its support for a pluralistic political system.
[24] (Domestic Political Affairs)
- 1995**
May The National Assembly approves proposals to create six administrative regions to replace the 10 regional divisions that had been in place since colonial rule.
[24] (Domestic Political Affairs)
- November The National Assembly approved new names for the regions and finalised details of their exact boundaries and sub-divisions.
[24] (Domestic Political Affairs)
- 1997**
May On 23 May, a new constitution is adopted by the Constituent Assembly but is not fully implemented. [24] (Domestic Political Affairs)
- 1998**
May Border conflict with Ethiopia erupts into heavy fighting; thousands of Eritreans expelled from Ethiopia and many Ethiopians leave Eritrea. This conflict lasts until 2000. [24] (Conflict with Ethiopia)
- 1999 The border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia continues. Numerous clashes occur during 1999 between Eritrean and Ethiopian troops.
[24] (Conflict with Ethiopia)
- 2000**
April Peace talks organised by the Organisation for African Unity in Algiers to end the border conflict fail. [24] (Conflict with Ethiopia)
May Hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea resume. [24] (Conflict with Ethiopia)
June The Eritrean and Ethiopian governments sign ceasefire agreement and agree to UN monitoring force along border. [24] (Conflict with Ethiopia)
December The Eritrean and Ethiopian governments sign a peace agreement in Algeria establishing commissions to mark border, exchange prisoners, return displaced people and hear compensation claims. [24] (Conflict with Ethiopia)
- 2001**
February Eritrea accepts United Nations plans for a temporary demilitarised zone along its border with neighbouring Ethiopia. [24] (Conflict with Ethiopia)
Ethiopia says it has completed its troop withdrawal from Eritrea in accordance with a United Nations-sponsored agreement to end the border war.
[24] (Conflict with Ethiopia)
April The Eritrean government announces that its forces have pulled out of the border zone with Ethiopia - a key provision of the peace agreement signed between the two countries. [24] (Conflict with Ethiopia)
May A dissident group at the centre of the PFDJ publicly expresses strong criticisms of the President. This group is known as the 'Group of 15' or 'G-15'. (In later

sources as 'G11', thus referred to as 'G15/G11').

[24] (Domestic Political Affairs)

- September The Government closes all privately owned newspapers. Following this the police arrest ten leading journalists. **[6c] (p6)** (Amnesty International – 'You have no right to ask', 19 May 2004).
Security authorities detain 11 members of the G11/G15 group. Four members escape arrest. **[24] (Domestic Political Affairs)**

2002

- March On 31 March, the ten journalists arrested in September 2001 begin a hunger strike. Nine of the ten were moved from the 1st Police Station in Asmara to an unknown location. **[6c] (p7)** (Amnesty International – 'You have no right to ask', 19 May 2004)
- April On 13 April, the International Tribunal announces a decision on the border issue between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Both Eritrea and Ethiopia declare victory. Confusion over which country controls Badme remains.
[24] (Conflict with Ethiopia)
- May Roma Gebremichael, the wife of one of the G-15 detainees, is arrested.
[6c] (p7) (Amnesty International – 'You have no right to ask', 19 May 2004)
- October Malta departs over 200 asylum seekers back to Eritrea. They are detained on arrival and held incommunicado without charge or further explanation.
[6c] (p5) (Amnesty International – 'You have no right to ask', 19 May 2004)

2003

- March The Boundary Commission categorically rules Badme to be in Eritrean territory. Ethiopia voices its opposition to the ruling. **[24] (Conflict with Ethiopia)**

2004

- July UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan visited the Horn of Africa in a new initiative to kick-start the stalled Ethiopian-Eritrean peace process. **[17b]** (United Nations 'IRIN - Ethiopia-Eritrea: Chronology of Key Events in 2004', 5 January 2005)
- September The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) expresses disappointment after the Eritrean Government re-imposed restrictions of movement along a crucial supply route for its peacekeepers. **[17b]** (United Nations IRIN – 'Ethiopia-Eritrea: Chronology of Key Events in 2004', 5 January 2005)
- November Prime Minister Zenawi announces a five-point plan to try to end the border stalemate with Eritrea, saying his country would accept, "in principle", the April 2002 ruling of the independent Boundary Commission that was intended to end hostilities between the two neighbours. He, however, insists that the ruling is still illegal and unjust. Any attempt to implement the Hague-based decision, he adds, "might lead to a serious escalation of the tension between the two countries and thereby undermine the peace". **[17b]** (United Nations IRIN – 'Ethiopia-Eritrea: Chronology of Key Events in 2004', 5 January 2005)

2005

- February The United Nations noted a large number of troops being deployed at the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The troops remained on their own soil, but Ethiopian soldiers had come within a 20 - 40 kilometre range of the frontier. **[25d]** (BBC News – 'Concern at Horn troop deployment', 17 February 2005)

August	A UN special envoy for the humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa, conducted an eight-day visit to the region to assess prospects for long-term food security. The government asks the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to cease its operations in the Horn of Africa country. [17c] (United Nations IRIN – ‘Ethiopia-Eritrea: Year in Brief, July-Dec 2005 - A Chronology of Key Events’, 11 January 2006)
October	The Eritrean government imposes more restrictions on the movement of UN peacekeepers, days after grounding UN helicopter flights. [17c] (United Nations IRIN – ‘Ethiopia-Eritrea: A Chronology of Key Events in 2005’, 11 January 2006)
December	The United Nations relocates some UNMEE staff to Ethiopia following Eritrea’s decision to expel European and North American personnel. [17c] (United Nations IRIN – ‘Ethiopia-Eritrea: A Chronology of Key Events in 2005’, 11 January 2006)
2006	
January	Christian Today NGO reports that the patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church has been placed under arrest. [49] (Christian Today – ‘Eritrean Patriarch Under House Arrest as Government Repression Increases’, 23 January 2006)
June	The Eritrean government places travel restrictions on foreign nationals and dual nationality holders that apply to travel into the country and travel within the country. [3e] (US State Dept ‘Document Reciprocity Schedule’, Eritrea - accessed on 13 July 2012)
October	On 16 October, the Eritrean army moves 1,500 troops and 14 tanks into the demilitarised zone of the Ethiopian/Eritrean border. The United Nations state that this is a “major breach of the ceasefire” agreement. [25e] (BBC News – ‘Eritrea incursion “to pick crops”’, 17 October 2006)
December	Military service round-up (Giffa) begins in Asmara; 500 parents and relatives of young people missing from official registers targeted for arrest, detention and fines. [6d] (Amnesty International – ‘Eritrea: Over 500 parents of conscripts arrested’, 21 December 2006)
2007	
June	Police raids in Asmara, Pente Christians are detained. [50a] (Christian Solidarity Worldwide – ‘Demonstrators call for release of Eritrean Prisoners of Conscience’, 29 May 2009)
November	Eritrea accepts border line demarcated by international boundary commission. Ethiopia rejects it. [25a] (BBC ‘Timeline: Eritrea’, 14 June 2012)
2008	
January	UN extends mandate of peacekeepers on Ethiopia-Eritrea border for six months. UN Security Council demands Eritrea lift fuel restrictions imposed on UN peacekeepers at the Eritrea-Ethiopia border area. Eritrea declines, saying troops must leave border. [25a] (BBC ‘Timeline: Eritrea’, 14 June 2012)
April	UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon warns of likelihood of new war between Ethiopia and Eritrea if peacekeeping mission withdraws completely. Outlines options for the future of the UN mission in the two countries. Djibouti accuses Eritrean troops of digging trenches at disputed Ras Doumeira border area and infiltrating Djiboutian territory. Eritrea denies charge. [25a] (BBC ‘Timeline: Eritrea’, 14 June 2012))
May	The Eritrean government calls on the UN to terminate its peacekeeping mission. [25a] (BBC ‘Timeline: Eritrea’, 14 June 2012))

- June Fighting breaks out between Eritrean and Djiboutian troops in the disputed Ras Doumeira border area. **[25a]** (BBC 'Timeline: Eritrea', 14 June 2012))
- September It was reported by Awate that an Eritrean government intelligence camp in Molokhseito was attacked by armed units of the Eritrean National Salvation Front (ENSF). **[27b]** (Awate – 'Eritrean Government Unit Attacked', 26 September 2008)
- November The Eritrean government launched a fresh crackdown on practicing Christians. At least 110 evangelical believers were detained. The Christians were arrested in all parts of the country apart from Asmara. Those detained included 65 members of the evangelical Kale Hiwot Church. **[51]** (Walta – 'Eritrea launches new crackdown on Christians', 27 November 2008)

2009

- February The Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported that a bomb explosion killed two people and wounded eight others at a restaurant in western Eritrea. The ABC report further stated that: "Eritrea blamed Ethiopia for an earlier bomb attack in January 2008 that killed one person and wounded several others in another market town near the western border". **[53a]** (Reuters – 'Eritrea govt says bomb kills two, wounds eight', 28 February 2009)
- April UN Secretary Council says Eritrea failed to fulfil its obligation to withdraw troops from disputed border area of Djibouti under an ultimatum issued in January [2009]. Eritrea denies having troops on Djiboutian soil. **[25a]** (BBC 'Timeline: Eritrea', 14 June 2012))
- June The United Nations reported that Eritrea was facing a food crisis caused by poor harvests, a lack of rain, and the high cost of food. **[17d]** (United Nations IRIN – 'How bad is the food crisis really?' - analysis, 12 June 2009)
- August International tribunal ruling stipulates that Eritrea and Ethiopia have to pay one another financial compensation for war damages incurred in the 1998-2000 border war. **[25f]** (BBC News – 'Eritrea to pay Ethiopia millions', 18 August 2009)
- December The United Nations Security Council voted to impose sanctions on the Eritrean regime. The sanctions place an arms embargo on Eritrea, an asset freeze on specific businesses and individuals, as well as a travel ban on political and military leaders to be identified by a sanctions committee. **[14]** (The Times – 'UN imposes sanctions on Eritrea over support for rebels in Somalia', 23 December 2009)

2010

- February The Red Sea Afars Democratic Organisation (RSADO) stated that it had killed 17 Eritrean government soldiers and injured more than 20 others in an attack on military barracks. The attack was carried out in Fura in central Dankalia on 15 February according to a RSADO spokesman. **[74]** (Ethiopian Journal [Reuters] – 'Eritrea rebels say [they] killed 17 government troops', 18 February 2010)
- March On 27 March, Egyptian police reportedly shot dead Eritreans trying to cross the Egyptian/Israeli border illegally. **[28]** (France24 News - 'Egypt police kill two Eritrean migrants at Israel border', 27 March 2010)
- August An Ethiopian government ruling allows Eritrean refugees the freedom to live outside refugee camps, provided they can support themselves, or receive

support from friends or relatives. **[17e]** (United Nations IRIN - 'Eritrea-Ethiopia: Refugees embrace life "out of camps"', 30 August 2010)

September On 29 September, the Ethiopian government accused Eritrea of continuing to undermine efforts to restore peace and stability in Somalia by arming insurgents battling the transitional Government in Mogadishu and urged the United Nations Security Council to strictly enforce existing sanctions against Eritrea. **[54a]** (United Nations News Service - 'At General Assembly, Ethiopia accuses Eritrea of spoiling peace efforts in Somalia', 29 September 2010)

2011

April On 22 April, thousands of Eritreans living in Ethiopia took part in public demonstrations in various locations in Ethiopia, including the capital, Addis Ababa. The protesters called for international pressure to bring down the Isaias Afewerki regime. **[57d]** (Sudan Tribune - 'Eritreans demonstrate in Ethiopia against Asmara government', 22 April 2011)

May On 24 May, the Eritrean people celebrated 20 years of independence. **[46d]** (Shabait [via allafrica.com] 'People Welcomes May 24 With Sense of Patriotism and Pride', 24 May 2011)

August The members of IGAD (Inter-Governmental Authority on Development) - Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Djibouti, Sudan and Somalia, consider Eritrea's request to rejoin the East African body. Eritrea withdrew from IGAD in 2007 after IGAD supported Ethiopia's intervention to oust an Islamist militia force from power in Mogadishu. **[25j]** (BBC News - 'Eritrea seeks to rejoin East African body Igad', 2 August 2011)

October Human Rights Watch reported that the Sudanese authorities have been increasingly deporting Eritreans back to their country without allowing them to claim asylum. Over 300 Eritreans have reportedly been handed over to the Eritrean military authorities without being assessed for refugee status. This action has been condemned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). **[29e]** (Human Rights Watch - 'Sudan: End Mass Summary Deportations of Eritreans', 25 October 2011)

December The UN Security Council toughened sanctions against Eritrea after its East African neighbours accused the country of continuing to provide support to Islamist militants. The UN resolution requires foreign companies involved in Eritrea's mining industry to ensure funds from the sector are not used to destabilise the region. Eritrea denied the accusations. **[25h]** (BBC News - 'Eritrea: UN Security Council toughens sanctions', 6 December 2011)

2012

January A UN monitoring panel stated that allegations made by the Kenyan government that Eritrea had supplied weapons to Somalia's Al-Shabaab militants towards the end of 2011 were incorrect. These allegations had been dismissed by the Eritrean government which demanded that the UN Security Council conduct an independent inquiry into the matter. A preliminary report by the Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group (SEMG) to the United Nations Security Council revealed that Eritrea probably did not supply weapons to Al-Shabaab, but the allegations will be investigated further. **[57c]** (Sudan Tribune - 'UN clears Eritrea over allegation of arming Somali rebels', 17 January 2012)

March Ethiopian forces launch a military assault on positions inside Eritrea. Ethiopian officials state that Eritrea has been training subversive groups to carry out

- attacks inside Ethiopia. A number of people were reportedly killed and captured when three camps were attacked. **[25k]** (BBC News – ‘Ethiopia “launches military attack inside Eritrea”’, 15 March 2012)
- April Eritrea's president made an appearance on Eritrean national TV to dispel rumours he is either dead or ill. He stated that the people who had been spreading the rumours were indulging in psychological warfare to ‘disturb’ the people. The rumours on various opposition websites and on social media noted that the president had not appeared on television for nearly a month, which many people believed was unusual. **[25l]** (BBC News - ‘Eritrea President Isaias Afewerki goes on TV to dispel health rumours’, 28 April 2012)
- May In its annual survey, the Committee to Protect Journalists (NGO) identified Eritrea as the most censored country in the world. According to the NGO, Eritrea is “completely closed” to foreign journalists, and stated that only tightly controlled state media are allowed to operate there. **[39]** (Voice of America – ‘Eritrea President Denies Stifling Free Speech’, 18 May 2012)
- July The United States government imposes sanctions on two Eritrean government officials for supporting the Somali Islamist rebel group, Al Shabaab. **[25m]** (BBC News - ‘US sanctions on Eritrea spy chief Negash over al-Shabab’, 6 July 2012)

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Annex B

POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA)

Formerly Alliance of Eritrean National Forces and founded in 1999. Became the Eritrean National Alliance in 2002. Adopted present name in 2004. Broad alliance of 13 opposition parties opposed to the PFDJ regime. Chairman: Berhane Yemane “Hanjema”. Secretary General: Husayn Khalifa.

[24] (Political Organisations) (Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012)

Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP)

Founded 2001 as the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front - Democratic Party (EPLF-DP); breakaway group from the PFDJ; name changed to above in 2004.

[24] (Political Organisations) (Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012)

Tesfamichael Yohannes is head of the party. [68c] (Asmarino: Mesfin Hagos steps down as chair of EDP, 9 April 2009)

Eritrean Islamic Jihad (EIJ)

Radical opposition group. In August 1993, split into a political wing and a military wing.

[24] (Political Organisations) (Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012)

Eritrean Islamic Party for Justice and Development (EIPJD)

Founded in 1988 as the Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement. Changed name to al-Khalas in 1998; political wing of EIJ. Leader: Khalil Muhammad Amer.

[24] (Political Organisations) (Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012)

Eritrean Liberation Front -Central Command (ELF-CC)

Founded in 1982. Chairman: Abdella Idriss.

[24] (Political Organisations) (Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012)

Eritrean Liberation Front-Revolutionary Council (ELF-RC)

Chairman: Ahmed Woldeyesus Ammar.

[24] (Political Organisations) (Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012)

Eritrean National Commission for Democratic Change (ENCDC)

New organisation set up during a political opposition conference held from 31 July to 9 August 2010 in Addis Ababa. One of the aims of the new Commission is to bring the various elements of the Eritrean political opposition together to form a more united opposition against the Eritrean regime. [68a] (Asmarino - ‘Message from the National Commission for Democratic Change’ [ENCDC], 28 October 2010)

Eritrean People’s Democratic Party (EPDP)

Relatively new party. On 25 May 2009, the Eritrean Democratic Resistance Movement united with the Eritrean People’s Party (EPP), with the latter retaining the name of the united organisations. On 1 January 2010, the EPP merged with two other parties, the Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP) and the Eritrean People’s Movement (EPM) to found a new party - the Eritrean People’s Democratic Party (EPDP). This was achieved in a conference in December 2009.

[27f] (Awate – ‘The Next EDA-EPDP Confrontation’ - 17 January 2011)

Eritrean People’s Liberation Front - Democratic Party (EPLF-DP)

The EPLF-DP announced its establishment in January 2002. Leadership is based abroad but claims that its main support base is in Eritrea.

[7b] (Jane's 'Eritrea Internal Affairs', updated 10 November 2011)

Eritrean Popular Movement (EPM)

Founded in 2004. Leader: Abdallah Adem.

[24] (Political Organisations) (Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012)

Eritrean Revolutionary Democratic Front (ERDF)

Founded in 1997 following a merger of the Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrea and a faction of the People's Democratic Front for the Liberation of Eritrea. Leader: Berhane Yemane "Hanjema".

[24] (Political Organisations) (Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012)

Gash Setit Organization

Leader: Ismail Nada.

[24] (Political Organisations) (Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012)

People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ)

Founded in 1970 as the Eritrean Popular Liberation Forces (EPLF); following a split in the Eritrean Liberation Front, renamed the Eritrean People's Liberation Front in 1977; adopted present name in February 1994. Christian and Muslim support; in May 1991 took control of Eritrea and formed provisional Government; formed transitional Government in May 1993; Chairman: Isaias Afewerki. Secretary General: Alamin Mohamed Said.

[24] (Political Organisations) (Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012)

Red Sea Afar Democratic Organisation

Afar opposition group. Secretary General: Ibrahim Haroun.

[24] (Political Organisations) (Europa World Plus, undated, accessed on 16 May 2012)

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Annex C

PROMINENT PEOPLE

The source used in the following list is [7c] (Jane's 'Eritrea - Political Leadership', updated 11 May 2012, accessed on 22 May 2012).

President of Eritrea	Isaias Afewerki. [7c]
Minister of Defence	General Sebhat Ephrem. [7c]
Minister of Justice	Fozia Hashim. [7c]
Minister of Foreign Affairs	Osman Salih Muhammad. [7c]
Minister of Information	Ali Abdu Ahmed. [7c]
Minister of Finance	Berhane Abrehe. [7c]
Minister of Trade and Industry	Dr Giorgis Teklemikael. [7c]
Minister of Agriculture	Arefaine Berhe. [7c]
Minister of Labour and Human Welfare	Salema Hassan. [7c]
Minister of Maritime Resources and Fisheries	Salah Mekki. [7c]
Minister of Construction	Abraha Asfaha. [7c]
Minister of Education	Semere Rusom. [7c]
Minister of Health	Aminah Nur Husayn. [7c]
Minister of Energy and Mines	Ahmed Hajj Ali. [7c]
Minister of Transport and Communications	Woldemikael Abraha. [7c]
Minister of Tourism	Amna Nur Hussein. [7c]
Minister of Local Government	Woldenkial Ghebremariam. [7c]
Minister of Land, Water and the Environment	Tesfai Ghebresselassie. [7c]
Minister of National Development	Giorgis Teklemichael. [7c]

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Annex D

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Amnesty International
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK)
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FH	Freedom House
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRC	International Committee for Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
RSF	Reporters sans Frontières
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSD	United States State Department
WHO	World Health Organization

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Annex E

LETTER DATED 1 APRIL 2010 FROM THE BRITISH EMBASSY IN ASMARA ABOUT NATIONAL SERVICE AND ILLEGAL EXIT



Foreign &
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British Embassy
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1 April 2010

ERITREA COUNTRY INFORMATION

This note has been produced by officials at the British Embassy in Asmara in response to a series of questions about national service and exit from Eritrea sent by the Country of Origin Information Service of the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA). Any further enquiries regarding its contents should be directed to UKBA. The information in this note has been obtained from local sources in Eritrea and is publicly disclosable. The note does not reflect the opinion of officials of the embassy, nor any policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

CAVEAT

Embassy officials wish to make it clear that it is virtually impossible to be categorically certain about military/national service practice and exit procedures in Eritrea. The official rules/regulations are mostly obscure, liable to subjective interpretation, and can be changed without notice, consultation or public information campaigns. The information contained in this note, provided by local sources and contacts in Eritrea, is what embassy officials believe to be true.

National Service/Military Service

Does the Eritrean Ministry of Defence run the military/national service programme? If so, can one assume that officials in that department decide when and where military service round-ups occur, rather than the president or a senior government official from another department?

Officially, the Eritrean Ministry of Defence runs the military/national service programme. However, in practice other ministries are involved in the assignment of people to national service positions in ministerial dependencies. It is impossible to confirm who decides when and where military service round-ups occur. However, it is assumed that the Eritrean Ministry of Defence decides this, possibly on instructions from the president.

How often do military service round-ups (Giffas) occur? Do they start on an exact date every year?

It is important to note that there are no set government policies or standard procedures regarding how round-ups are organised. Military service round-ups take place usually around 4 to 5 times a year but can occur more frequently or less frequently, and usually coincide with public holidays when large numbers of people are out and about. They can occur in various parts of Eritrea and are not confined to one particular part of it. Once rounded up, people are sent from Asmara to the Adi Abeto camp for processing and onward assignment.

In general, are all documents relating to military or national service printed in one language only, e.g. Tigrinya? If not, in what other languages are these documents printed in? Can these documents be obtained by bribing the relevant officials or can forgeries easily be obtained?

Documents are mostly printed in Tigrinya and Arabic. There have been reports of fake documentation but the general view is that it is difficult to forge these documents.

Are call-up papers issued to individuals who have to undergo military or national service? Do they always name individuals specifically? If call-up papers are not issued, how are individuals informed that they have to undergo military or national service?

When students finish school in the Sawa military/school camp, they are automatically assigned to either military service, another type of national service or further education, and are given the relevant documents to that effect at that time. Other Eritreans are forcefully brought into military/national service as a result of round-ups or house searches. Military service or national service call-up documents are not issued to these individuals and they are not informed in advance that they have to undergo military/national service.

Are siblings or other family members called up to serve in the armed forces if their brothers or sisters have deserted or evaded military service?

We have no information to suggest or indicate that this occurs.

Is it possible for wealthy individuals to bribe military officials to avoid undergoing military or national service? If so, have there been actual cases of this happening? Can individuals close to the political ruling class avoid military or national service?

If so, have there been actual cases of this happening?

Wealthy conscripts and individuals who are close to the political ruling class may be able to influence the decision as to where they will be located (e.g. Asmara, living at home but working

for military/ministry) but cannot avoid military/national service altogether. Individuals who can afford it, and do not want their children to undergo military/national service, may try to send their children overseas to study. But it is notable that even respected and senior government officials send their children to military/national service assignments. It is thought that the children of dead fighters, especially children responsible for the support of the remaining parent, may be excused from military/national service, and in some cases may receive some sort of preferential treatment.

Are there any categories of people exempt from military or national service, such as disabled people, pregnant women, or full-time religious clerics? Are such individuals given military/national service exemption documents? If so, who has the authority to issue them?

People who are disabled or medically unfit for military/national service, and pregnant women can and have been exempted from military/national service. To be exempted, these individuals have to be medically certified by a doctor at a military base as disabled/medically unfit. Full-time religious clerics/nuns can be required to do military/national service although in previous years they have been exempt. It is believed that some churches or mosques are limited to having a minimum of serving religious members who are exempt from military/national service.

Regarding military service exemption on medical grounds, are doctors allowed to issue exemption documents following a medical examination, or are they only allowed to make a recommendation to the military authorities, who then make a decision?

Doctors produce the medical reports needed and then make a recommendation as to whether a particular individual should be exempted from military/national service. The military authorities make the decision regarding exemption and issue the relevant exemption documents.

Whilst in military service, can individuals apply for leave? If so, are there standard written rules that must be followed or is this a matter for local commanders who judge each case on its merits? Are leave papers issued if leave is granted and are these documents issued in a standard format? Can local military commanders be bribed to grant leave?

There are no standard rules with regard to leave. Individuals have no entitlement to leave, and cannot request it, but can be given it arbitrarily by local commanding officers. If a military commander authorises leave for an individual, documents are issued specifying where that person may travel to and for how long (usually one month maximum). We do not know whether leave papers are issued in a printed standard format or are handwritten. We can only assume that they would have to name the individual concerned, and be signed by a military commander at the relevant base, to have any validity. It is rumoured that military commanders accept bribes to grant leave by the more wealthy conscripts but this cannot be substantiated.

Do individuals have any say in what type of national service they may be required to do or where in the country they may be required to go? Can individuals change from undergoing one form of national service to another? For example, can a person working for a nationalised company ask to be transferred to a government department?

In principle, individuals have no choice about their military/national service assignment though some may be able to influence where (e.g Asmara). Individuals are generally arbitrarily transferred by their commanders or supervising officers. There are no standard rules with regard to such transfers.

Are individuals who have completed military/national service given an official document as proof that they have completed military/national service, such as a "Completion of National/Military Service" certificate? If so, who has the authority to issue them?

There is no such thing as a "Completion of National/Military Service Certificate". In the absence of such documents, a person's age gives an indication regarding whether they should be in military/national service - under 57 for men, or under 47 for women who are unmarried.

Are women treated differently when it comes to military/national service? Are they assigned different types of work to men? If they are married, or have children, are they treated any differently from single women or women without children? If they are Muslim, are they treated with more consideration than Christians, or are they exempt from some types of national service?

Generally speaking, single women are not treated very differently to men (though we have heard that their rations, for example, may be less meagre). Married women and women with children are exempt from military/national service. Single women who become formally engaged are also exempt. Muslims and Christians are treated the same (they are given no special allowances for prayers, etc) although it is believed that Muslim women in rural areas are rarely called up. This may be due to early marriages and the fact that those communities are made up of mostly poor, subsistence-farming families.

Obtaining a Passport and Exit from Eritrea

What are the procedures for obtaining an Eritrean passport? What government office or agency issues passports? What documents are needed to be submitted before a passport can be issued? Is there just one passport-issuing office or several in various locations around Eritrea? Is it always necessary for an individual to have completed his national service or military service obligations first before being issued with a passport? Are they always issued in a standard format, if so, in what language? Can officials be bribed to issue passports?

Individuals working in a government ministry or agency must obtain ministerial permission before applying for a passport. Other individuals must obtain authorisation from a local government administrator and present a birth certificate, any military/national service medical exemption documents, and an ID card. The administrator will then instruct the Department of Immigration (which has offices in regional capitals) to issue a passport. All of the Department of Immigration's regional offices can issue passports. There is a fee for this service. For some time now, it has been very difficult to obtain first-issue passports. In practice, those individuals who are exempt from military/national service, such as people who are ill or old, as well as government officials who need to travel abroad on official business, will find it easier to obtain passports. Even in these cases, however, there is no guarantee that a passport application will be accepted. Passports, which are due to go biometric at some point, are printed in English, Tigrinya and Arabic. There were rumours in 2009 that staff in the Immigration Department and Asmara Airport were running a passport/papers/exit visa stamp scam to facilitate illegal exit from the country. The general belief is that bribery occurs but is not a widespread practice.

Can local authorities issue passports?

See above answer on passport issuing.

Are exit visas stamped in passports, or are they stickers that are stuck on a page of a passport, or are they issued as a separate paper document? Are they always issued in a standard format, if so, in what language?

Exit visas used to be issued in sticker form but following a 2009 alleged visa scam are now stamps. They are produced in a standard format, in English only.

Are exit visas issued free of charge? If payment is required, are government officials or other categories of people exempt from payment?

Exit visas are not issued free of charge. The cost is currently around £8 (GBP) for a single exit visa. If government officials are travelling on official business we assume, but cannot confirm, that they do not pay fees.

Where can Eritreans obtain exit visas? Is there only one government office that issues them? If so, do Eritreans always have to apply in person at this office? Can exit visas be obtained illegally by bribery or can they be forged?

Exit visas are issued by the Department of Immigration which has regional offices. All these regional offices have the authority to issue exit visas. Applicants must apply in person only. Without expert knowledge, we can only assume that the stamp/signature can be forged, and that the demand for false exit visas will increase.

Can certain categories of people obtain exit visas more easily than others, such as government ministers, prominent businessmen, people who need medical treatment abroad, or religious clerics?

In practice, the majority of Eritreans wishing to travel abroad are not issued with exit visas and therefore cannot leave the country legally. Government officials and ministers can certainly obtain exit visas provided they have been given authorisation to travel abroad on official business. People who need medical treatment abroad can also obtain exit visas. Businessmen will almost always have to satisfy the age limit. In other words, they would have to be over the age of 57 before they would be allowed to apply for an exit visa. Women are not given preferential treatment or dispensation. For example, we know of many Eritrean women who have undergone military service, or are married and have children, but have still been refused exit visas for bona fide journeys abroad. Religious ministers or clerics can obtain exit visas if they need to travel abroad to attend meetings or events in connection with their religious faith, but they would have to belong to one of the officially recognised religions, such as the Roman Catholic Church.

Do people who need medical treatment abroad need to obtain a letter or medical certificate from a doctor to prove that they have the disease or condition they claim to have, as well as a military/national service medical exemption document before they are issued with exit visas? Do they also need other documents to obtain exit visas, such as letters from foreign hospitals or foreign doctors confirming that the medical treatment needed is available in a specific hospital in a specific country?

People wishing to travel overseas for medical treatment are required to have a medical certificate provided by a government medical panel. The medical panel is made up of doctors who have the authority to carry out a medical examination on the person concerned. Medical certificates are only issued after a medical examination has been carried out. Depending on the age of the person concerned and severity of the condition, the normal requirement for

military/national service exemption papers may be waived. We do not believe that letters from foreign doctors are also required as it is local medical opinion that carries weight in these matters.

Are multi-exit visas ever issued (valid for more than one journey)?

Multi-exit visas are not issued. Exit visas are valid for one month and for one journey only.

Have there been cases of Eritrean military officials/immigration officials/border guards accepting bribes or otherwise assisting in illegal exits?

We do not have substantive evidence to prove this but it is widely believed that officials, border officers and military/police at checkpoints, have and do accept bribes, and help facilitate the escape of very large numbers of young Eritreans to other countries (Sudan mostly).

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Annex F

LETTER DATED 10 AUGUST 2010 FROM THE BRITISH EMBASSY IN ASMARA ABOUT OFFICIAL DOCUMENTATION AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT IN ERITREA



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10 August 2010

INFORMATION ABOUT OFFICIAL DOCUMENTATION AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT WITHIN ERITREA

This note has been produced by officials at the British Embassy in Asmara in response to a series of questions about official documentation and freedom of movement within Eritrea, sent by the Country of Origin Information Service of the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA). Any further enquiries regarding its contents should be directed to UKBA. The information in this note has been obtained from local sources in Eritrea and is publicly disclosable. The note does not reflect the opinion of officials of the embassy, nor any policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

CAVEAT

Embassy officials wish to make it clear that it is not possible to be categorically certain about how the rules and regulations relating to official documentation and freedom of movement within Eritrea are implemented in practice. The information contained in this note, provided by local sources and contacts in Eritrea, is what embassy officials believe to be true.

Official documentation and freedom of movement within Eritrea

As requested below are the responses to the questions asked:

Q. Are travel permits needed to travel to certain parts of the country? If so, where? If travel permits are issued, are they issued in a standard printed format, and what government department issues them? What details do they contain? If travel permits are compulsory for travel within the country, what are the criminal penalties for not possessing them?

A. Travel permits are required to travel anywhere in Eritrea but travel to border areas is not permitted. They are issued by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), the Demobilisation Commission and other local administration offices. The format is not standard. For those individuals who have completed their national service, they can travel using their ID Card and their demobilisation papers. If issued by the MOD, the travel permit contains: full name, date of travel, expiry date of permit and where travelling to and from. The demobilisation paper contains: full name, military number, date of birth, national service details and a photograph of the holder. Anyone found trying to leave without the necessary permit or demobilisation paper will be detained until they can prove they have completed their national service. Those individuals who have not reported for national service will be detained as deserters and sent to a military training camp.

Q. Is the possession of ID cards compulsory? If so, what government department issues them? Are they issued in one standard printed format? What details do they contain (full name, date of birth, place of birth, address, photograph of the holder)? Do Eritreans need to carry ID cards with them on every occasion they are out and about, in case they are stopped by police officers and asked to produce ID? If ID cards are compulsory, what are the criminal penalties for not possessing them?

A. ID cards are compulsory for anyone over the age of 18. They are issued by the Department of Immigration and Nationality in a standard format. They contain: full name, date of birth, place of birth, address and a photograph of the holder. ID cards need to be carried at all times. If found not to be in possession of an ID card, individuals will be detained until such time as one can be produced. They rely on friends or guards to inform their family of their detention.

Q. Do the police carry out routine security checks at various parts of the country, such as major crossroads and road junctions, bus stations and market squares, occasions in which ID documentation have to be produced? Do they have the legal right to carry out routine on-the-spot ID checks.

A. By virtue of Article 51 of the T/Criminal Procedure Code of Eritrea, the police and army are empowered to carry out routine checks on individuals, unless the person concerned is a member of the diplomatic community. Individuals have to produce their ID card and demobilisation papers.

Q. Does Eritrean law make the registration of births, marriages and deaths compulsory? If so, what government department, local authority or official body issues birth, marriage and death certificates? Is there a central registry office where copies of these documents can be obtained? Is it common practice for Eritreans to register births, marriages and deaths? If Eritrean law makes the registration of births, marriages and deaths compulsory, what are the criminal penalties for not registering births, marriages and deaths?

A. According to Art 5 of the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF) Civil Law, every People's Congress has the duty and responsibility to organise Civil Status Officers to register births, marriages and deaths within its jurisdiction, and are duty-bound to issue certificates on request by any individual, as prescribed under Article 9 of the law. But in practice, People's Congresses have not yet been re-established since independence, in the spirit of the law. Therefore, registration of births, marriages and deaths is not available, except in Asmara, where registration has been in practice since the time of Italian colonisation. However, registration is not mandatory for the people - even in Asmara. That said, most people do register births in order to include all family members on their ration cards. There is no central register office where records are held.

Please let me know if you need any further information.

Regards,

HM Ambassador

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Annex G

LETTER DATED 11 OCTOBER 2010 FROM THE BRITISH EMBASSY IN ASMARA ABOUT PASSPORT CONTROLS, NATIONAL SERVICE, MILITARY TRAINING AND HOMOSEXUALITY



British Embassy
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11 October 2010

INFORMATION ABOUT PASSPORT CONTROLS, MILITARY TRAINING IN SAWA, NATIONAL SERVICE ROUND-UPS AND EXEMPTIONS, AND TREATMENT OF HOMOSEXUALS

This note has been produced by officials at the British Embassy in Asmara in response to a series of questions about passport controls, military training in Sawa, national service round-ups and exemptions, and treatment of homosexuals, sent by the Country of Origin Information Service of the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA). Any further enquiries regarding its contents should be directed to UKBA. The information in this note has been obtained from local sources in Eritrea and is publicly disclosable. The note does not reflect the opinion of officials of the embassy, nor any policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

CAVEAT

Embassy officials wish to make it clear that it is not possible to be categorically certain about how the rules and regulations relating to passport controls, military training in Sawa, and national service round-ups and exemptions are implemented in practice. Likewise, it is not possible to be categorically certain about how homosexuals are viewed and treated in Eritrea. The information contained in this note, provided by local sources and contacts in Eritrea, is what embassy officials believe to be true.

We have answered the most recent questions as fully as we are able, please find our responses below:

Treatment of Ethiopians and treatment of returned failed asylum seekers and other Eritreans at airport immigration control points

Q. Would Ethiopians find it more difficult to enter and exit Eritrea through Eritrean airports than other nationalities?

A. Ethiopians cannot enter or exit Eritrea through Eritrean airports. Ethiopian refugees are kept separately from others and normally do not have access to UNHCR. If they chose to leave, they would normally exit Eritrea through the Sudanese border after a laissez-passer is granted from an immigration office. The Red Cross are involved in the repatriation of Ethiopian refugees.

Q. Would the Eritrean immigration authorities view Ethiopians with suspicion?

A. Yes, as mentioned above, Ethiopians are separated from other nationalities and are usually held in detention or in designated areas.

Q. Would it make any difference if they had been born in Eritrea and had lived in the country for many years?

A. They would not be treated differently if they had been born in Eritrea and had been issued with an Eritrean ID card giving them the right to live and work in Eritrea.

Q. Would Ethiopians need any other documents, apart from passports?

A. As there is no Ethiopian government representation in Eritrea, they would need to obtain a laissez-passer from the Eritreans to enable them to travel back to Ethiopia.

Q. How would the Eritrean immigration authorities view returned failed Eritrean asylum seekers, independent journalists, and leaders or active members of opposition political parties? [These would be individuals with valid passports or travel documents]. Is it likely that they would have to undergo lengthy questioning about their political activities and loyalties, whether they had paid the required income tax or completed their national service duties, and then let through immigration control? Or is it more likely that they would be questioned, arrested and detained for an indefinite period?

A. This is a grey area as there is little experience of failed asylum seekers returning to Eritrea. However, the Eritrean authorities tell us that if they return and have not committed a criminal offence, no action would be taken. But we have to put this into context. It is an offence to leave the country illegally, so returnees would be liable to detention and questioning. Some have been released without further action but those who have not undertaken military service could be sent to a military training camp.

National service round-ups and exemptions and military training in Sawa

Q. What is the precise role of the Kebelles (local authorities) in national service round-ups?

A. Occasionally, the local authorities issue letters to those who have not entered into the military urging them to do so. Round-ups are normally carried out by the military.

Q. How do they assist the military authorities? Do they routinely issue national service call-up papers to people in their jurisdiction, under instructions from the Ministry of Defence? Or do they just inform the military authorities of the home addresses of people required to undergo national service, thus making it easier for house-to-house round-ups to be made?

A. The most common form of assistance is through informing the military of any individuals who have not undertaken military training. They usually get this information through 'informants'. The Kebelles distribute call-up papers to those found in breach of the rules on military training.

Q. Does military training at Sawa always last six months, or can it vary according to how well resourced the camp is at any given time, or at times of war?

A. Another grey area. Military service normally lasts 18 months - 6 months military training at Sawa before being deployed in other areas. During times of conflict or heightened security threat, this period can be extended. We have no information on the resources available in camps.

Q. Do military commanders at Sawa have any freedom to vary the length of the training period?

A. We have no information concerning the freedom military commanders have to vary the length of the training period.

Q. Are there any other military training camps currently used?

A. Yes.

Q. If so, what are their names and where are they located?

A. The camps we are aware of are at Weah and Meater in the Northern Red Sea Region, Kiloma and Alla in the Southern Red Sea Region.

Q. Can people be required to undergo military training at Sawa or forced into military service more than once, perhaps as a form of punishment for some misdemeanour?

A. Anyone who deserts the military and are then captured will be punished and then required to undertake a full period of military training.

Q. Certain categories of people can be given official exemption from national service duties such as the disabled, elderly people or pregnant women. More generally, can military commanders or supervising officials exercise discretion in exempting individuals from national service duties, including military training and military service?

For example, can an individual from a poor family who is the only working person in that family be exempted, or can an individual who has to look after relatives who are severely ill, disabled, or elderly, be exempted, although this is not strictly permitted by the rules?

A. Normally, married women or women with young children are exempt from military service as are those registered disabled. The elderly have usually completed their national service, but if conflict ensues they could be expected to take up arms. Military commanders are able to

authorise medical exemptions, with a report from a military medical officer. There are no exemptions for those from a poor background or those who have family members dependent on them through age or illness.

Societal and official government attitudes to homosexuals

Q. Homosexual acts are illegal in Eritrea and the punishment is imprisonment. Have there been any known prosecutions and convictions in Eritrean courts during the last ten years?

A. We cannot find any details on prosecutions or detentions without trial specifically involving homosexual acts.

Q. If not, can one conclude that the authorities tolerate practising homosexuals to a certain extent?

A. Homosexuality is not tolerated to any extent.

Q. What are societal attitudes to known homosexuals?

A. The attitudes are negative. No one will admit to being homosexual or admit to knowing anyone rumoured to be homosexual.

Q. Are they likely to encounter hostility, lose their jobs, experience family ostracisation, or be discharged from the army (if they are soldiers)?

A. Soldiers would be arrested. It is difficult in the climate of secrecy in Eritrea to know if anyone has lost their job but it can be expected they would. No evidence is available on how families would react.

Q. Can homosexuals avoid prosecution or societal hostility if they conduct themselves discreetly and do not draw attention to themselves?

A. Yes.

I hope the above information is useful.

Regards,

HM Ambassador

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Annex H

LETTER DATED 3 OCTOBER 2011 FROM THE BRITISH EMBASSY IN ASMARA ABOUT NATIONAL SERVICE AND EXIT VISAS



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03 October 2011

Country of Origin Information Service
United Kingdom Border Agency
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Dear colleague

Eritrean COI questions for the post in Asmara - September 2011

This letter is a response to questions sent by the Country of Origin Information Service of the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA). Any further enquiries regarding its contents should be directed to UKBA. The information in this letter has been obtained from local sources in Eritrea and is publicly disclosable. This letter does not reflect the opinion of officials of the British Embassy in Asmara, nor any policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Whilst we make every effort to ensure the replies are accurate, the answers given are based on common practice, which the government of Eritrea does not always follow.

Below are responses to the Eritrean COI questions for September 2011.

National service and marriage

- Would the Eritrean authorities allow a woman to get married whilst on a national service work programme or in military service? If so, would that woman become exempt from national service duties as soon as she married, and could produce a marriage certificate as proof?

Women are able to marry whilst on a national service work programme, but not during military service, which normally is the first six months of the national service programme.

Following her marriage, a woman may apply for demobilisation, a decision on whether to grant lies with the relevant dept/ministry. It is not standard practice for a woman to be demobilised on marriage, some are expected to continue their national service for various reasons.

- Are there any formal procedures to be followed by the woman concerned after the marriage ceremony to allow her to be exempt, or is a woman automatically exempt as soon as she is married?
- Women are not automatically exempt on marriage. They have to formally apply for demobilisation, if on national service, or exemption if national service has not yet started.
- Are national service exemption documents issued to such women?

Yes, firstly they will be issued with a certificate releasing them from duty, followed by a demobilisation card.

Exit visas

- We understand that the Eritrean government requires some foreign nationals (eg long-term residents) to obtain exit visas before leaving the country. Are the exit visas stamped in the passports of foreign nationals of the same type and format as the exit visas stamped in Eritrean passports? If not, in what way do they differ? Would such individuals have to go to a local immigration office to obtain an exit visa, just as Eritreans are required to do?

Exit permits for foreign nationals are the same type and format as those for Eritrean nationals. All exit permits are issued by the local immigration office.

Yours sincerely

HM Ambassador

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