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State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011 - Eritrea

The year 2010 saw sanctions imposed on Eritrea by the UN, following a vote by the Security Council in December 2009. According to UN Security Council Resolution 1907, the sanctions include an arms embargo as a result of of Eritrea providing 'political, financial and logistical support to armed groups engaged in undermining peace and reconciliation in Somalia and regional stability'. In addition, the government of President Isaias Afewerki continued to suppress, detain and torture political opponents and prisoners of conscience.

Religious freedom was severely curtailed, especially for Jehovah's Witnesses, who are opposed to compulsory military service on the grounds of conscientious objection. In 2010, the US Committee on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) again recommended that Eritrea be classified a country of particular concern. Apart from Jehovah's Witnesses, USCIRF noted that the situation for evangelical and Pentecostal Christians remained very serious. The Eritrean government uses a registration requirement (and the withholding of permission) as a way of curtailing religious activities. Muslims at risk of repression included those who were viewed as radical or opposed to the government-appointed head of the Muslim community. Hundreds of members of unauthorized religious groups continued to be detained. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that a woman died in April 2010 following two years' detention in a cargo container for not renouncing her unregistered faith.

Women in Eritrea, including those from minority communities, face state harassment for their own political views and actions, but also as a result of the actions of their children

and relatives. Indefinite military service is compulsory for all able-bodied young people, male and female. Each year, many young people leave the country to avoid this, and it appears that their mothers are then targeted. According to a 2009 HRW report on indefinite conscription in Eritrea, families and especially mothers are subject to retribution if conscripts desert and leave the country. In such cases, families are fined 50,000 Nakfa (approximately US \$3,300). Several persons interviewed said that land would be taken or mothers would be imprisoned if the families could not pay the fine.

According to a woman interviewed by HRW, sexual harassment, serious death threats as well as inhumane treatment and conditions are the daily reality of women conscripts in the military in Eritrea. Because of their objection to military service on the grounds of conscientious objection, Jehovah's Witnesses are particularly targeted. HRW concluded that: 'Eritrea's extensive detention and torture of its citizens and its policy of prolonged military conscription are creating a human rights crisis and prompting increasing numbers of Eritreans to flee the country.'

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