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Freedom in the World 2017 - Eritrea

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Freedom Status: Not Free
Aggregate Score: 3 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)
Freedom Rating: 7.0 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)
Political Rights: 7 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)
Civil Liberties: 7 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 5,400,000
Capital: Asmara
GDP/capita: \$545
Press Freedom Status: Not Free

OVERVIEW

Eritrea is an authoritarian, highly militarized state that has not held a national election since independence in 1993. The ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), headed by President Isaias Afwerki, is the sole political party. Rule of law is flouted, arbitrary detention is commonplace, and citizens are required to perform national service, often for their entire working lives. The government shut down all independent media in 2001, and freedoms of assembly and association are not recognized.

Key Developments in 2016:

- In June, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) recommended that the UN Security Council refer the situation in Eritrea to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The council's commission of inquiry urged the ICC to investigate what it described as systematic and gross human rights violations that may amount to crimes against humanity.

- The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) estimated that 17 journalists remained in prison in Eritrea at the end of the year, the highest number in sub-Saharan Africa.

Executive Summary:

The June 2016 UNHRC commission of inquiry report on human rights conditions in Eritrea found that the government continued to enforce indefinite military service and was responsible for arbitrary detention, torture, rape, murder, persecution, imprisonment in violation of international law, and enforced disappearances. The report said the systematic nature of these actions suggested that crimes against humanity had been committed. Due to the refusal of the Eritrean government to cooperate with the commission, the report relied on first-hand testimony from 550 Eritreans who had fled the country. Eritrea's government rejected the findings, alleging that the commission had relied on biased testimony.

Despite these findings, the European Union (EU) signaled its readiness for more constructive relations with Eritrea. In January 2016, it signed a 200-million-euro (\$222-million) development deal with Asmara. EU officials expressed hope that the deal would lead to improved conditions inside Eritrea and stem the flow of Eritreans fleeing for Europe. However, according to Human Rights Watch, there is little evidence that the Eritrean government had implemented promised reforms such as time limits and pay increases for conscripts. And Eritreans continued to flee to Europe in large numbers: according to the EU, there were more than 33,000 first-time asylum seekers in 2016.

Tensions remained high between Eritrea and Ethiopia, following armed confrontations by rival troops on their contested border in June. Eritrea accused its neighbor of instigating a series of artillery attacks.

Explanatory Note:

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Eritrea, see [*Freedom in the World 2016*](#).