



## **Eritrea – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 13 April 2010**

### **Any reports of restrictions on people leaving Eritrea.**

A *Human Rights Watch* report states:

“Citizens travelling inside Eritrea need travel permits while those trying to leave the country need visas, which are rarely granted.” (Human Rights Watch (8 May 2009) *Eritrea: slender land, giant prison*)

In a section titled “Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection or Refugees, and Stateless Persons” the 2010 *US Department of State* country report on Eritrea states:

“While citizens could generally travel freely within the country and change their places of residence, the government restricted travel to some areas within the country, particularly along the borders with Sudan and Ethiopia. The government continually modified its requirements to obtain passports and exit visas, sometimes suspending passport or exit visa services without prior warning. Citizens participating in national service were often denied internal travel permits, passports, and exit visas. Many persons who previously were issued passports were not allowed to renew them, nor were they granted exit visas. Military police periodically set up roadblocks in Asmara and on roads between cities to find draft evaders and deserters. Police also stopped persons on the street and forcibly detained those who were unable to present identification documents or movement papers showing they had permission to be in that area.” (US Department of State (11 March 2010) *2009 Human Rights Report: Eritrea*)

This section of the report also states:

“Citizens and some foreign nationals were required to obtain exit visas to depart the country. Persons routinely denied exit visas included men up to the age of 54, regardless of whether they had completed national service; women under the age of 47; members of Jehovah's Witnesses; and other persons out of favor with, or seen as critical of, the government. In 2006 the government began refusing to issue exit visas to children 11 years and older. The government also refused to issue exit visas to children, some as young as five years of age, either on the grounds that they were approaching the age of eligibility for national service or because their expatriate parents had not paid the 2 percent income tax required of all citizens residing abroad. Some citizens were given exit visas only after posting bonds of approximately 150,000 nakfa (\$10,000).” (ibid)

In a section headed “Military conscription” the 2009 *Amnesty International* report on Eritrea states:

“Some young people aged 17 were required to register for national service for the following year and were refused exit permits so that they could not leave the country.” (Amnesty International (28 May 2009) *Report 2009 – Eritrea*)

In a section titled “Draft evaders/deserters” the most recent guidelines document published by the *UN High Commissioner for Refugees* states:

“Furthermore the authorities reportedly do not grant exit visas to those of military age. Among those routinely denied exit visas are men up to the age of 54, regardless of whether they have completed national service, and women under the age of 47, as well as students wanting to study abroad. Individuals of, or approaching, draft age, who leave Eritrea illegally, will be at risk of persecution as a (perceived) deserter or draft evader upon return to Eritrea. This is equally true for those who have completed active national service or have been demobilized, given that all persons of draft age are subject to national service and, as such, are liable to be recalled.” (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (April 2009) *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea*, p.20)

In a section titled “Restrictions on the Freedoms of Expression, Conscience, and Movement” (sub-section headed “Denial of exit visas”) a *Human Rights Watch* report states:

“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.” (Human Rights Watch (16 April 2009) *Service for Life: State Repression and Indefinite Conscriptioin in Eritrea*, pp.63-64)

In a sub-section headed “Shot for trying to flee Eritrea” this report states:

“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. Whoever tries to cross will be killed immediately and repeat offenders are also killed... those who escape again and again will be shot [even if they are not trying to cross borders]. This was issued by the Ministry of Defense in April 200[7].’ A former intelligence officer described to Human Rights Watch the execution of two men, a soldier and a university student, who he stated were detained and then shot at Alla 17 prison for intending to flee the country.” (ibid, pp.39-40)

See also *Human Rights Watch* news report which states:

“Increasing numbers of Eritreans are fleeing the indefinite national military service imposed by the Eritrean government and pervasive arbitrary detention and torture. Eritrea routinely imprisons individuals caught trying to flee the country and implements ‘shoot to kill’ orders for anyone crossing the border without permission. If the government identifies someone who has successfully crossed into Ethiopia or Sudan, it subjects their family members to large fines and sometimes imprisonment.” (Human Rights Watch (15 January 2010) *Libya: Don’t Send Eritreans Back to Risk of Torture*)

A report from *War Resisters International* states:

“Four male teenagers were caught and killed by Eritrean soldiers after their attempt to cross the border to Ethiopia illegally. This was reported by the Eritrean People’s Party (EPP) on 11 February 2009. The four teenagers were part of a group comprising six underages, who were caught as they tried to escape crossing the border to Ethiopia. Soldiers fired at them. One of them managed to escape to Ethiopia. The remaining teenagers went back and hid, but surrendered to the soldiers at last. They passed on their student papers and told that they were from neighbouring villages. Nevertheless soldiers opened fire and shot the remaining five teenagers. Goitom Solomon, Kiros Haile, Tesfai Debessai and Mengistu Gergis were killed. Tekeste Woldai was slightly wounded, could escape later and reported about the incident.” (War Resisters International (2 March 2009) *Eritrea: teenagers trying to flee the country killed by Eritrean military*)

The 2010 *Human Rights Watch* annual report on Eritrea refers to this incident as follows:

“The Eritrean government is also responsible for extrajudicial killings. Some deliberate killings occurred during detention, others when prisoners attempted to escape confinement or flee the country. The government maintains a ‘shoot-to-kill’ policy for anyone caught trying to cross the country’s borders. Five teenage boys were reportedly shot at close range after having been captured trying to cross the border to Ethiopia in December 2008. Four were killed; the fifth managed to escape to Ethiopia after the others fell on him and he faked death.” (Human Rights Watch (20 January 2010) *World Report 2010 – Eritrea*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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