



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION REPORT

ERITREA

13 OCTOBER 2009

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Latest news

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Preface

- i This Country of Origin Information Report (COI Report) has been produced by COI Service, United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA), 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 8 September 2009. The 'Latest News' section contains further brief information on events and reports accessed from 9 September 2009 to 13 October 2009. The report was issued on 13 October 2009.
- ii The Report is compiled wholly from material produced by a wide range of recognised 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 brief summary of the source material identified, focusing on the main issues raised in asylum and human rights applications. 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 COI Report reflects the way it is used by UKBA 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 COI 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.
- vi As noted above, the Report is a collation of material produced by a number of reliable information sources. In compiling the Report, no attempt has been made to resolve discrepancies between information provided in different source documents. For example, different source documents often contain different versions of names and spellings of individuals, places and political parties, etc. COI 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 COI Report and the accompanying source material are public documents. All COI Reports are published on the RDS section of the Home Office website and the great majority of the source material for the Report is readily available in the public domain. Where the source documents identified in the Report are available in electronic form, the relevant web link 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 the COI Service upon request.
- ix COI Reports are published regularly on the top 20 asylum intake countries. COI Key Documents are produced on lower asylum intake countries according to operational need. UKBA officials also have constant access to an information request service for specific enquiries.
- x In producing this COI Report, COI Service has sought to provide an accurate, balanced summary of the available source material. Any comments regarding this Report or suggestions for additional source material are very welcome and should be submitted to UKBA as below.

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INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP ON COUNTRY INFORMATION

- xi The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency to make recommendations to him about the content of the UKBA's country of origin information material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on UKBA's COI Reports, COI Key Documents and other country of origin information material. Information about the IAGCI's work can be found on the Chief Inspector's website at <http://www.ociukba.homeoffice.gov.uk>
- xii In the course of its work, the IAGCI reviews the content of selected UKBA COI documents and makes recommendations specific to those documents and of a more general nature. A list of the COI Reports and other documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI or the Advisory Panel on Country Information (the independent organisation which monitored UKBA's COI material from September 2003 to October 2008) is available at <http://www.ociukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

- xiii Please note: it is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any UKBA 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.

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Latest News

EVENTS IN ERITREA FROM 9 SEPTEMBER 2009 TO 13 OCTOBER 2009

- 15 September According to a report published on the Dehai website, four migrants were killed by Egyptian border guards trying to enter Israel on 9 July 2009, bringing the death toll in the Sinai area to 12, since May 2009. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry stated that the “deaths of African migrants trying to cross from the Sinai peninsula into Israel are justified for security reasons.” Human Rights Watch stated that “Egyptian security forces killed 33 migrants at the border between July 2007 and October 2008.” The report further stated that “since February 2008, Israel has deported thousands of African migrants to Egypt on grounds they are economic and not political refugees, according to media reports from Israel.”
 Dehai news - Egypt Defends Killing of Migrants Trying to Cross Into Israel - 15 September 2009
http://www.dehai.org/archives/dehai_news_archive/0739.html
 Date accessed 16 September 2009
- 13 September The “Sudan Tribune” newspaper reported in September 2009 that the Ethiopian Administration for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA), had stated that the number of Eritrean refugees that had fled to Ethiopia had doubled during 2009. The report explained that “on average, 1122 Eritreans are crossing borders to Ethiopia and this figure is twofold comparing to that of last year’s average, 600.” According to the report, 36,402 Eritrean refugees are currently in Ethiopia, living in camps. The UNHCR and IOM have been engaged in arranging for many of these refugees to be settled in other countries.
 Sudan Tribune - Eritreans influx in Ethiopia doubles in 2009 - 13 September 2009
<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article32439>
 Date accessed 15 September 2009
- 9 September According to an Amnesty International press release dated 9 September 2009:
 “So far this year, Egyptian security forces have killed at least 11 people trying to cross the border into Israel. At least 11 others have been wounded - some critically.
 “...thousands of individuals, including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, mostly from Sudan and Eritrea as well as other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, try to cross from Egypt to Israel each year.
 “They run the risk of being shot dead by Egyptian border guards who still appear to lack adequate training for handling such situations and frequently resort to lethal force rather than other means of intervention, despite the spiralling number of victims. No investigation is known to have been held into any of the shootings and the names and nationalities of those killed are rarely disclosed.”
 Amnesty International press release - Egypt: Four migrants killed - Authorities must reign in border guards - 9 September 2009
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?id=ENGPRES200909091304&lang=e>
 Date accessed 16 September 2009

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. GEOGRAPHY

- 1.01 The State of Eritrea (Permanent Committee on Geographical Names) is a country in the Horn of Africa, bordered by Sudan to the west, and Ethiopia to the south. In area the country covers 117,400 sq km (45,300 sq miles). [81]. The capital city is Asmara, other main cities being the port of Massawa, Keren, and Barentu. [1a] (Europa Online, accessed on 14 September 2009)
- 1.02 The CIA World Factbook section on Eritrea (3 September 2009 version) gives a July 2009 population estimate of 5,647,168. [28]. According to Ethnologue, 12 languages spoken in Eritrea. Three of these languages are Eritrea's official languages and these are English, Standard Arabic, and Tigrinya. [59]
- 1.03 There are nine main ethnic groupings in Eritrea. There is one further ethnic grouping, the Djerberti, Muslims of the central highlands, but the Djerberti are not recognised as an official ethnic group by the Eritrean government. [25b] (Mebrat Tzehaie)

See [Ethnic groups](#)

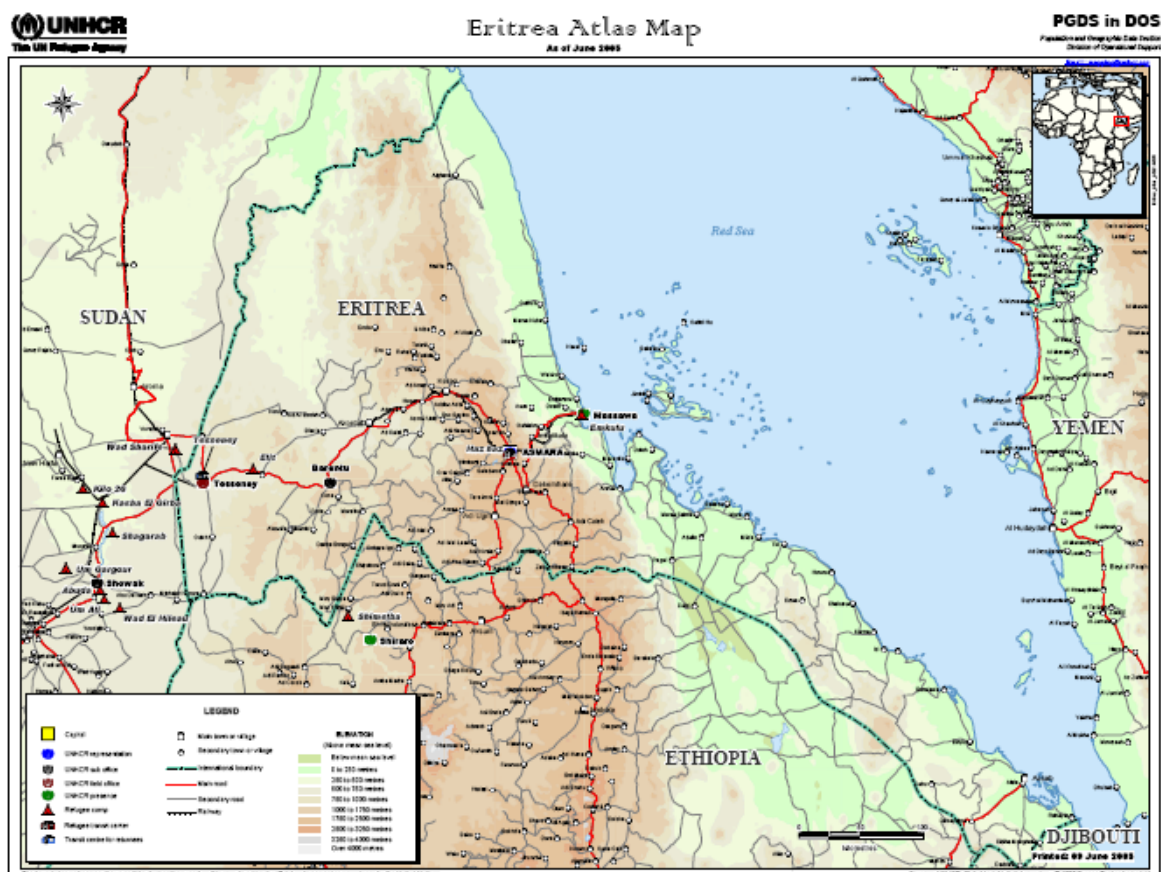
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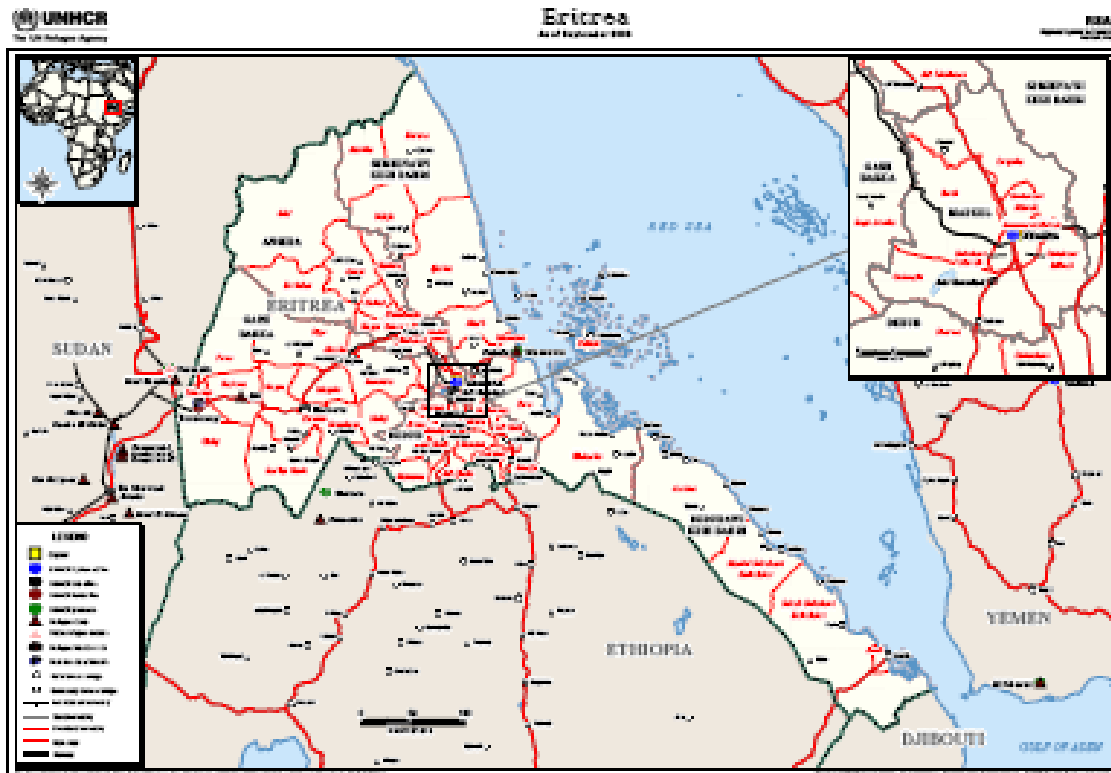
MAPS

- 1.04 Eritrea, political map, September 2006, from the main United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHCR) website at:

<http://www.unhcr.org/publ/PUBL/45.pdf>

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/publ/opendoc.pdf?tbl=PUBL&id=3dee2c620>





- 1.05 Further maps of Eritrea can be found via the Perry-Castaneda collection website, the University of Texas at <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/eritrea.html>.

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2. ECONOMY

- 2.01 Eritrea's economy is largely based on agriculture, which involves 80 per cent of the working population, but only contributes 12 per cent to the GDP; remittances from the Eritrean diaspora account for 32 per cent of GDP. [4a] **(Economy)** (US State Department Background Note on Eritrea, dated April 2009). Europa stated that the national currency is the Nakfa. [1a]
- 2.02 The CIA World Factbook section on Eritrea (3 September 2009 version) noted that:
- “Since independence from Ethiopia in 1993, Eritrea has faced the economic problems of a small, desperately poor country, accentuated by the recent implementation of restrictive economic policies. Eritrea has a command economy under the control of the sole political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ)...the government strictly controls the use of foreign currency, limiting access and availability. Few private enterprises remain in Eritrea. Eritrea's economy depends heavily on taxes paid by members of the diaspora.” [28]
- 2.03 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees “Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Eritrea” report, published in April 2009, added:
- “The country has practically no exports, while the cost of imports account for roughly 40 percent of the GDP. The cost of living, particularly in urban areas, is steadily increasing beyond the reach of most Eritreans. There is a growing scarcity of basic staples such as bread, sugar and fuel, and, despite Government programmes designed to ensure food security, two thirds of the population are still reliant on food aid. Social services in Eritrea remain basic and poverty is reportedly widespread.” [18c] (p8)
- 2.04 The CIA World Factbook (3 September 2009 version) cites figures of 37,500 mainline telephones (2006) and 70,000 (2007) mobile telephones in use. Most mainline telephones are in Asmara. Only about two people out of every 100 has a telephone (fixed line or mobile). [28]
- 2.05 Awate reported on the collapse of the economy in early 2008, giving details such as:
- “Conservatively, Eritrea's annual cereal grain demand is estimated to be 600,000 metric tons (or 6 million quintals.) Even in the best of times, the government was only able to produce about 25% of the nation's need - with the deficit accommodated by imports or food aid from donors like FAO, WFP and USAID...grain cereals are now being sold exclusively at the so-called 'Fair Shops' (*Rt'awi Dukan*), the distribution centers of Red Sea Trading Corporation, or 09 (*Bado T'Shiate*), the financial arm of the ruling party. *Taff* [tef] is being sold at 5,000 Nakfa per quintal (100 kilos), and *Meshela* is being sold at 1,500 Nakfa per quintal. The ration for a family of five is 10 kilos per month; for families with more than five members, the ration is 15 kilos per month. This has presented a serious hardship to Eritrean families: historically, even a family of modest means needs about 25 kilos per month.” [50a] (Awate, 7 April 2008)

- 2.06 The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations listed Eritrea as one of 22 countries facing food security problems, in a report published on 28 May 2008. Eritrea was cited as a country that imported 100 per cent of its petroleum; 80 per cent of its grain foodstuffs; and now had a population of whom nearly 75 per cent were undernourished. [92] (Voice of America report, 28 May 2008). On Independence Day (24 May), President Isaias made a speech announcing import restrictions and price controls “to counter rising world commodity prices”. [11a] (Agence France Presse via Dehai News, 25 May 2008). *Eritrea Daily* noted in June 2008 that bread and pasta were now to be classed as luxury items. [38b].
- 2.07 Awate on 29 April 2008 reported that “the cost of living, particularly in urban areas, is now increasingly beyond the reach of most people. One of the most shocking developments in urban areas has been that begging is now widespread and coming from quarters one would least expect.” [50a]. Awate reported on 27 December 2008 that “Eritreans are seriously malnourished and there is such a severe food shortage, Eritrean farmers have been ordered to sell all their grain to the government, at a fixed price. The ban on selling grain to anyone except the government is so literal that farmers cannot even sell their grain to relatives. In Gash-Barka, the farmers have been ordered to keep one quintal for themselves and sell the rest to local authorities.” [50c].

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3. HISTORY

- 3.01 Prior to independence in 1993, Eritrea was part of a federation with Ethiopia from 1952, until it was formally annexed as a province by Ethiopia in 1962. During Ethiopia's annexation of Eritrea, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) began an armed struggle, splitting in the mid-1970s with a new group emerging, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) in 1977. The EPLF, after military defeats and reconstitution of its forces, launched an attack in 1989 that culminated in the taking of Asmara in May 1991. [1a] (Europa Online, accessed on 14 September 2009)

INDEPENDENCE AND TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT

- 3.02 Europa World Online added further:

“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, [at which] 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 of whom 80% remained dependent on food aid. The agricultural sector had been severely disrupted by the war, and urban economic activity was almost non-existent.” [1a] (Europa Online, accessed on 14 September 2009)

- 3.03 The UN supervised a referendum on independence in April 1993, with a 99.8 per cent vote of Eritreans in favour of independence; the 24 May was declared Independence Day 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 - with Isaias Afewerki, the leader of the EPLF, installed as President and Head of State. [1a] (Europa Online, accessed on 14 September 2009)

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THE PEOPLE'S FRONT FOR DEMOCRACY AND JUSTICE AND CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

3.04 According to Europa, in February 1994, the EPLF reformed as a political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ); in March, the Consultative Council was replaced with a State Council; and the National Assembly reconstituted to include 75 members of the PFDJ Central Committee and 75 directly elected members, though no election mechanism was presented. (Europa Online, accessed on 14 September 2009). A Constitutional Committee of 58 members (50 of whom were government appointees) was established to reorganise the country administratively. In July 1994 and January 1995, the Constitutional Committee discussed a draft Constitution, and in May 1995, the Constitutional Commission brought in a subdivision of six administrative regions, with the National Assembly approving the regions' names in November 1995. [1a] (Europa Online, accessed on 14 September 2009)

3.05 The Europa Online account summarises the changes in the National Assembly and other representative institutions in the late 1990s:

"In early 1997 the Government established a Constituent Assembly, comprising 527 members (150 from the National Assembly, with the remainder selected from representatives of Eritreans residing abroad or elected by regional assemblies), to discuss and ratify the draft constitution. On 23 May the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution, authorizing 'conditional' political pluralism and instituting a presidential regime, with a President elected for a maximum of two five-year terms. The President, as Head of State, would appoint a Prime Minister and judges of the Supreme Court; his or her mandate could be revoked should two-thirds of the members of the National Assembly so demand. The Constituent Assembly was disbanded, and a Transitional National Assembly (consisting of the 75 members of the PFDJ Central Committee, 60 members of the Constituent Assembly and 15 representatives of Eritreans residing abroad) was empowered to act as the legislature until the holding of elections to a new National Assembly." [1a]

3.06 Europa added:

"It was initially announced that Eritrea's first post-independence elections, which were scheduled to have been held in 1998, but were postponed indefinitely following the outbreak of hostilities with Ethiopia (see below), would take place in December 2001. However, during 2001 the likelihood of elections taking place in that year diminished, as President Afewerki assumed an increasingly authoritarian position." [1a]

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BORDER CONFLICT WITH ETHIOPIA 1998 - 2000

- 3.07 In November 1997, Eritrea changed currency from the Ethiopian birr to the Eritrean nakfa. This effectively stopped cross-border trade between Ethiopia and Eritrea; and the border was closed without precise demarcation. In 1998, both countries accused the other's troops of border incursions and by May 1998, hostilities began in the border region. Various international attempts at mediation failed over 1998 and 1999, with intense fighting resuming in February 1999. A stalled mediation in April 1999 began a period of numerous border clashes until 31 May 2000, when the Ethiopians declared that the war was over and they were withdrawing from captured Eritrean territories. Fighting continued while a peace agreement was discussed in Algiers. The casualties of the 1998 to 2000 war have been estimated at between 70,000 and 100,000. On 18 June 2000, the Algiers agreement was signed, agreeing to an immediate ceasefire and the deployment of a UN peace-keeping force. The UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) of 4,200 members was deployed by the UN Security Council in September 2000. [10d] (FCO Country Profile on Eritrea - 8 October 2007). The formal peace agreement was signed on 12 December 2000 in Algiers, with the UN pledged to establish two separate independent commissions to settle border demarcations and compensation agreements. [1a] (Europa Online, date accessed on 14 September 2009)
- 3.08 The border demarcation is an ongoing obstacle to peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The FCO Country Profile adds further detail:

"The Boundary Commission 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 BC's conclusions." [10d]

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BORDER TENSIONS WITH NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES, 2005 ONWARDS

- 3.09 Tensions continued with large numbers of troops massed on the disputed border in early 2005. An UNMEE spokesperson urged both countries to remain calm and show restraint. [8h] (BBC News Online, 17 February 2005). In December 2005, Eritrea ordered out Western UN troops serving in the UNMEE mission. However, most of UNMEE are from Asian and African countries and these remained. [8s] (BBC News Online, 16 December 2005)
- 3.10 On 16 October 2006, 1,500 Eritrean troops and 14 tanks entered the demilitarised zone. [8e] (BBC News Online, 17 October 2006). In May and June 2008, the Eritrean Government undertook a similar venture with an incursion over a disputed area of the Eritrea/Djibouti border, with claims of two Djibouti soldiers killed and 17 wounded in exchanges. Eritrea denied that it was at war with Djibouti. [8i] (BBC News Online, 6 May 2008); [8d] (BBC News Online, 11 June 2008)

- 3.11 The Eritrean/Ethiopian border area is heavily mined, as noted in the US State Department Human Rights report for 2008, published in February 2009:
- “According to the Government Commission for Coordination with the UN Peacekeeping Mission, an estimated three million landmines and unexploded ordnance remained from the 30-year war of independence and the 1998-2000 conflict with Ethiopia. Opposition groups reportedly laid new mines during the year. The Eritrean Demining Authority, in cooperation with the UN Mine Action Committee, continued demining activities in the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) between Eritrea and Ethiopia.” [4j] (section 1a)
- 3.12 From December 2007, the work of UNMEE in Eritrea became difficult to maintain, as the Eritrean Government impounded and delayed supplies of fuel to the force. By mid-February 2008, the situation had reached crisis point as the Eritrean Government refused to permit the UNMEE force to move its supplies over to northern Ethiopia. [66c] (Agence France Presse, 16 February 2008); [8o] (BBC News Online, 16 February 2008)
- 3.13 The United Nations Security Council voted unanimously to withdraw the UNMEE from Eritrea in July 2008, as stated in a UN Security Council news release of 30 July 2008:
- “The Security Council today [30 July 2008] terminated the mandate of the eight-year-old peacekeeping force monitoring the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea and requested the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to explore further with two Horn of Africa countries the possibility of a United Nations presence in the area.
- “Unanimously adopting resolution 1827 (2008), the Council decided to end the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) when its mandate expires on Thursday, 31 July [2008], and called on the two sides to cooperate fully with the world body in the process of liquidating the operation.
- “...expressing regret that Eritrea’s obstructions towards UNMEE had ‘reached a level so as to undermine the basis of the Mission’s mandate and compelled [it] to temporarily relocate from Eritrea’, the Council commended efforts by the Mission and its military and civilian personnel to accomplish their duties despite the difficult circumstances, and expressed also its deep appreciation for the contributions and dedication of troop-contributing countries to UNMEE’s work.” [35]
- 3.14 An Awate report dated 19 January 2009 stated that fighting between Djibouti and Eritrean troops had taken place in June 2008 at the Djibouti-Eritrea border. The report stated that the “battle came after weeks of complaint by Djibouti that Eritrea was occupying its territories since January [2008] and reinforcing its troops, a claim which was dismissed by Eritrea as ‘fabrication’.” [50ah].

- 3.15 In January 2009, the UN Security Council gave Eritrea an ultimatum to withdraw its forces from a disputed border region with Djibouti within five weeks. The UN resolution also called for Eritrea to remove its military hardware from the Ras Doumeira region and the island of Doumeira. [8b] (BBC News Online report “UN in Eritrea pull-out ultimatum”, 14 January 2009). The UN Security Council resolution was rejected by the Eritrean government. In January 2009, the Eritrean Foreign Ministry issued a statement about the UN resolution which stated that the resolution was “unbalanced and unnecessary” and that “Eritrea has not occupied any land that belongs to Djibouti” and “cannot accept a resolution that demands the ‘withdrawal of its forces’ from its own territory”. [62a] (Sudan Tribune report “Eritrea rejects UN resolution on border dispute with Djibouti”, 16 January 2009)

See [Internally Displaced Persons](#) and [Refugees in Eritrea](#)

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DOMESTIC POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS FROM SEPTEMBER 2001

- 3.16 The period around September 2001 was a key crisis point in Eritrean history after the 1998–2000 war. The US State Department Background Note on Eritrea, published in April 2009, summarised the situation:

“In September 2001, after several months in which a number of prominent PFDJ party members had gone public with a series of 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. All of these individuals remain held without charge and none [of them] are allowed visitors.” [4a]

- 3.17 The US State Department 2008 International Religious Freedom report stated that a 2002 government decree made it compulsory for all religious groups to register with the government or cease all religious activities. As a result, religious facilities not belonging to the four officially recognised religious groups were forced to close down. [41] (section 2)

See [Freedom of religion](#)

- 3.18 In early 2005, it was reported that the Government was intensifying its efforts to curb opposition, as referred to in a UNHCR letter dated 11 March 2005, stating:

“Based on various reports, it appears that the human rights situation in Eritrea has seriously deteriorated in the past two years [2004-2005]. Human rights violations continue to be reported, *inter alia*, with regard to the treatment of opposition political groups and movements, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, arbitrary detention and detention conditions (including reports of torture, ill-treatment and forced labor) and treatment of draft evaders/deserters.” [18f]

- 3.19 “Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki has backed a new Somali opposition alliance, saying Ethiopia’s fight against insurgents in Mogadishu was doomed to fail, state media reported on Saturday. The formation of the group, including top Islamist leaders, in Asmara this week generated yet more friction between Ethiopia and Eritrea after their border war of 1998–2000.” [76a] (Reuters report, 15 September 2007). Responding to American accusations that they abetted terrorists in the volatile Horn of Africa, Eritrean officials defended their actions and said that while they would like to have better relations with the United States, they had no intention of bowing to its pressure. [53] (International Herald Tribune, 18 September 2007). The United States has issued Eritrea with its strongest warning yet over its alleged support for terrorism. [8r] (BBC News, 8 September 2007)

See [Eritrean Refugees in Libya](#) and [Eritrean Refugees in Italy](#)

- 3.20 Drought has threatened the harvest, and Eritrea has been affected by the increase in world food prices: the prices of essential items have increased in 2008. [50h] (Awate, 19 March 2008); [50a] (Awate, 7 April 2008). There were reports of acute food insecurity and shortage: bread and pasta, as imports, were being restricted as luxury items, and begging was becoming a common sight in Asmara. [38b] (Eritrea Daily, 1 June 2008); [50a1] (Awate, 29 April 2008)

See [Economy](#)

- 3.21 In August 2008, Compass Direct News reported that 1,500 Bibles were confiscated from conscripts on arrival at the Sawa Defense Training School, and burned publicly. Eight students protested and were detained in metal shipping containers. [47c] (Compass Direct News “Eritrea - Christian students shut into shipping containers”, 11 August 2008)
- 3.22 A Jehovah’s Witnesses Office of Public Information news release, dated August 2008, reported on police arrests of Jehovah’s Witnesses that had taken place in July and August 2008. Some of the Jehovah’s Witnesses were subsequently imprisoned. [63]

See [Jehovah’s Witnesses](#)

4. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

4.01 In June 2009, Awate reported that:

“Following a two-day congress which was held on June 18-19, 2009, the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO) and the Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrean Kunama (DMLEK) have announced that they have created the Democratic Front of Eritrean Nationalities (DFEN).

“...the merger move by DMLEK and RSADO continues a trend that has emerged in the Eritrean arena recently. Last month [May 2009], four Eritrean opposition organizations (Eritrean Liberation Front, Islah, AlKhalas and the Eritrean Federal Democratic Movement) formed the Eritrean Solidarity Front. Also in May [2009], the Eritrean People’s Party (EPP), which is conducting merger talks with the Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP), announced that it had merged with the Democratic Movement of Gash-Setit. The Eritrean opposition landscape now is aligning into three blocks, with a number of opposition organizations now being wooed by the three blocks.” [50e]

See [Opposition groups in exile](#)

4.02 In August 2009, BBC News reported that an international tribunal in The Hague had ruled that the Eritrean government had to pay the Ethiopian government the equivalent of US\$174 million dollars as financial compensation for businesses and goods lost and villages destroyed during the 1998-2000 border war. The Ethiopian government is also required to pay financial compensation, and will have to pay the equivalent of US\$164 million to the Eritrean government. The Eritrean government stated that it has accepted the ruling. The BBC report ended by stating that the border dispute between the two countries is still an ongoing issue. [8c]

4.03 Assenna reported in August 2009 that President Afewerki had escaped an assassination attempt on 13 August. According to the report, members of the Eritrean Defence Forces tried to kill the president while he was travelling in his car but failed. A former freedom fighter, Daniel Habte Yihdego, who was involved in the assassination plot, was killed after an exchange of gunfire with the president’s bodyguards. [94b]

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5. CONSTITUTION

- 5.01 The CIA World Factbook section on Eritrea (3 September 2009 version) stated that a constitution was “adopted on 23 May 1997, but has not yet been fully implemented.” [28]. Human Rights Watch, in its 2009 annual report on events in 2008, also noted that the “constitution approved by referendum in 1997 remains unimplemented.” [29d]
- 5.02 A translation of the new constitution is available on the EDP opposition website, http://selfi-democracy.com/index.php?read=articles/documents/1137696360eritrean_e.htm [72b]; also at [2]

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6. POLITICAL SYSTEM

OVERVIEW

6.01 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 noted that:

“The [Eritrean] government came to power in a 1993 popular referendum in which voters chose to have an independent country managed by a transitional government; however the transitional government has not permitted the formation of a democratic system. The government twice scheduled elections in accordance with the Constitution but cancelled them without explanation. An official declaration in 2003, claimed that ‘in accordance with the prevailing wish of the people it is not the time to establish political parties, and discussion of the establishment has been postponed.’ Government officials also assert that implementation of the constitution is not possible until the border demarcation with Ethiopia is finalized. During the year [2008] the president claimed in an Al-Jazeera interview that elections might not take place for another 30 or 40 years. The country is a one-party state. Power rests with the PFDJ and its institutions. At times the government coerced membership in the PFDJ.” [4j] (Section 3)

6.02 The CIA World Factbook section on Eritrea (3 September 2009 version) adds more detail:

“Following a successful referendum on independence for the Autonomous Region of Eritrea on 23-25 April 1993, a National Assembly, composed entirely of the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice or PFDJ, was established as a transitional legislature; a Constitutional Commission was also established to draft a constitution; ISAIAS Afwerki was elected president by the transitional legislature; the constitution, ratified in May 1997, did not enter into effect, pending parliamentary and presidential elections; parliamentary elections had been scheduled in December 2001, but were postponed indefinitely; currently the sole legal party is the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ).” [28]

6.03 Regarding elections other than parliamentary elections, Europa Online noted that local government elections took place in 2003 and regional assembly elections took place in 2004. [1a]

6.04 The Eritrea section in the ‘Freedom in the World’ 2009 report, published in July 2009, stated that “Eritrea is not an electoral democracy”, and that the PFDJ “maintains complete dominance over the country’s political life. Instead of moving toward a democratic political system, the PFDJ has taken significant steps backward since the end of the war with Ethiopia.” [36] (p3)

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POLITICAL OPPOSITION

- 6.05 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 reported that:
- “There were no confirmed reports of political prisoners; however, several hundred individuals were detained beginning in 2001 for political reasons. Many were perceived to have ties to political dissidents or were believed to have spoken against government actions. Most of these detainees had not been tried and did not have access to legal counsel. The ICRC was not authorized to visit these detainees, and no information was available of their condition or circumstances of detention.” [4j] (section 1e)
- 6.06 As the FCO country profile on Eritrea, updated 8 October 2007, recounts, “In 2001 there was criticism of the leadership within the PFDJ. President Isaias responded by arresting eleven senior government figures, who are still being detained without trial.” [10d]. The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 noted that the G15/G11 group detainees were still in prison at the end of 2008, adding that there were “no developments in the 2002 arrests of individuals associated with the 11 PFDJ National Assembly members who were detained in 2001 or of Eritrean diplomats who were recalled from their posts. At least four Eritrean diplomats arrested in previous years, including former ambassador to China Ermias Debassai Papayo, remained in detention as did Aster Yohannes, wife of former foreign minister Petros Solomon.” [4j] (section 1d)
- 6.07 Awate published a report on 31 August 2006, ‘The obscure and tragic end of the G-15’, that claims to present information about the political prisoners since their arrest up to 2006. It talks of the prison complex at Eiraeiro, between Asmara and Massawa, that was completed in June 2003, and houses these political prisoners. Prior to 2003, the G15/G11 group were held at Embatkala, a former Ethiopian-era navy facility. The G15/G11 group were listed along with other prisoners held in Eiraeiro, creating a group of 36 political prisoners. Of the prisoners and of the G15 group prior to transfer to Eiraeiro, nine people are mentioned as having died in detention. The article claims food, clothing and hygiene are basic; the prisoners are held in solitary confinement, in chains, and totally *in communicado*. There were slight relaxations in 2006. The prison guards are strictly vetted and monitored, and fear that once the prisoners die they will be killed to ensure that the detention centre remains a secret. [50m]

See [Annex C Prominent people](#) – G15/G11 political prisoners; [Opposition Groups and Political Activists](#)

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Opposition groups in exile

- 6.08 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees “Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Eritrea” report, published in April 2009, stated:

“The unimplemented Eritrean Constitution guarantees to every citizen the right to form organizations for political ends. The People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), which came to power in 1993 by popular referendum, is however the only authorized political party. As a result, opposition groups have been driven out of the country and, since late 2004, operate only in exile.” [18c] (p20)

- 6.09 The CIA World Factbook section on Eritrea (3 September 2009 version) lists the names of various opposition groups:

“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 Iyob]”. [28]

- 6.10 The UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Eritrea report added:

“Opposition groups abroad, most of which are based in neighbouring Ethiopia and Sudan, are split into two major affiliations, namely (i) the Democratic Party, which has agreed a common set of objectives with two older parties (the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Eritrean Liberation Front - Revolutionary Council (ELF-RC), a splinter group of the ELF); and (ii) the Eritrean National Alliance (ENA), an umbrella organisation consisting of several and varied opposition groups. Some of these groups broadcast radio and television programmes to Eritrea via satellite, and maintain active websites highly critical of the Eritrean Government.” [18c] (p20-21)

- 6.11 The United States Library of Congress, Federal Research Division’s country profile of Eritrea, dated September 2005, adds further detail about the Eritrean National Alliance:

“The Eritrean National Alliance (ENA) is a 3,000-strong organization of 10 opposition groups. It was established in Khartoum in 1999, in part as an attempt by Sudan to retaliate against Eritrean support for the National Democratic Alliance, a Sudanese opposition group. The following groups belong to the ENA: the Eritrean Liberation Front, the Eritrean People’s Conference, the Eritrean Islamic Salvation Movement, the Eritrean Liberation Front – Revolutionary Council, the Eritrean Liberation Front – National Council, the Eritrean People’s Democratic Liberation Front, the Eritrean Revolutionary Democratic Front, the Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Kunama/Eritrea, the Eritrean Democratic Resistance Movement Gash-Setit, and the Eritrean Initiative Group.” [79] (p16)

- 6.12 Reports in 2006 highlighted the way that the opposition parties in exile were affected by the Eritrean Government's change in relations with other states, with *Gedab News* reporting, via Awate, that the Government of Sudan in June 2006 revoked permission for several Eritrean dissident organisations to host their congresses in Khartoum. On 28 August 2006, Awate published a follow-up report, 'Update: state of the Eritrean opposition and Eritrean Government', that filled in details about groups that the original June reports had no information on. [50a] (section 1e)
- 6.13 An Awate article of 26 November 2006 stated:
- "Within days after the normalization of the Eritrea-Sudan relationship, the Eritrean regime was given intelligence on the military bases of the armed opposition group [sic], the Eritrean opposition activists in Eastern Sudan, particularly the refugee camps and the type of help given to the Eritrean opposition by the Sudanese government.
- "Since then, the political space for Eritrean opposition groups in Sudan has been getting increasingly restricted [sic]. Sudan first denied them a venue to conduct their long-scheduled congresses. A few months later, the powerful opposition radio, *Al Sharq*, broadcasting from Khartoum, with repeaters in Kassala, was shut down." [50r] (p2)
- 6.14 A "Sudan Tribune" report, dated 1 June 2008, stated that:
- "Sudan has banned the activities of the Eritrean opposition in the country after years of support. The move indicates the level of good relations between Asmara and Khartoum.
- "The Sudanese government officially notified the representative[s?] of the Eritrean opposition in the Khartoum to stop political activities against Asmara government and close their venues.
- "According to [the] Islam Today website, which is well informed about Islamist movements in the Horn of Africa, the Sudanese government also ordered the Eritrean groups to [sur]render houses and vehicles granted by the Sudanese security service." [62b]
- 6.15 A Dehai article of 9 June 2008 recounted the struggle between 13 Eritrean opposition groups and the Sudanese authorities after the Government of Sudan placed a ban on political activities by such groups. [11b]
- 6.16 The Awate article, 'EDA will hold its congress', of 15 February 2007, noted that the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA) was permitted to hold its congress in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 15 February 2007. [50t]. By December 2007, Awate was reporting that the EDA had effectively split into two political camps, splitting on issues of national versus ethnic group representation of interests. [50ag]

See [Opposition Groups and Political Activists](#) and [Annex B Political Organisations](#)

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Human Rights

7. INTRODUCTION

- 7.01 The Human Rights Watch 2009 World Report, published in January 2009, covering events in 2008, summarised the human rights situation in Eritrea:

“President Isayas’s government controls all levers of power: political, economic, social, journalistic, and religious. A constitution approved by referendum in 1997 remains unimplemented. No national election has ever been held, and an interim parliament has not met since 2002. The judiciary exists only as an instrument of control. The press is entirely government-owned. No private civil society organizations are sanctioned; all are arms of the government or the sole political party, the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). International human rights organizations are denied entry.” [29d] (p1)

- 7.02 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008, published in February 2009, adds more detail to the Human Rights Watch report quoted above:

“The government’s human rights record remained poor [in 2008], and authorities continued to commit numerous, serious abuses, including: abridgement of citizens’ right to change their government through a democratic process; unlawful killings by security forces; torture and beating of prisoners, sometimes resulting in death; abuse and torture of national service evaders, some of whom reportedly died of their injuries while in detention; harsh and life threatening prison conditions; 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; and infringement on privacy rights, including roundups of young men and women for national service and the arrest and detention of the family members of service evaders. The government severely restricted freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, and religion. The government also limited freedom of movement and travel for expatriates, personnel of humanitarian and development agencies, and employees of the UN Mission to Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE). Restrictions continued on the activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Female genital mutilation (FGM) was widespread, and there was societal abuse and discrimination against women, members of the Kunama ethnic group, homosexuals, and persons with HIV/AIDS. There were limitations on worker rights.” [4j] (Introduction)

7.03 An Awate report, dated 6 January 2009, added further:

“The control of Eritrea by the ‘tegadelti’ in the ruling PFDJ party is total. All key ministries, the army, the press, trade unions, schools and even the churches and mosques are under a centralized hierarchic form of decision-making at the top of which is a party member, former combatant, or ‘Tegadalai’. Any and all who resist such control are considered threats to national unity and are forcefully dissolved, restricted, purged, and neutralised by the regime. Non-conformist ideas, political beliefs, religious beliefs, artistic and music styles are considered subversive, and adherents to these are punished accordingly... the country is divided into several administrative zones run by a group of generals elevated to the position of a kind of managerial board, answerable to no one except the president, and running each zone as if it is their fiefdom or private property.” [50b]

For details about specific human rights abuses, refer to:

[Torture in police detention](#); [Armed forces - extrajudicial killings](#);
[Torture in military detention](#); [Penalties for evading national service](#);
[Freedom of religion - arrests and detention](#); [Arrests and detention of journalists](#); [Exit-Entry procedures](#)

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8. SECURITY FORCES

8.01 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated that the:

“Police are officially responsible for maintaining internal security, and the army is responsible for external security; however, the government can call on 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, are responsible for detaining persons suspected of threatening national security. The military has the authority to arrest and detain civilians. Generally [the] police did not have a role in cases involving national security, but they were heavily involved in rounding up individuals evading national service.” [4]] (section 1d)

POLICE

8.02 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated:

“Police, who often were conscripted, were poorly paid, and corruption was a problem. During the year [2008] there were reports of police and other security forces committing crimes to supplement their income. Police typically used their influence as government officials to assist friends and family. There were reports that police demanded bribes to release detainees and that military forces accepted money to smuggle citizens out of the country. There were no mechanisms to address allegations of official abuse, and impunity was a problem.” [4]] (section 1d)

Arbitrary arrest and detention

8.03 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated:

“The law stipulates that detainees must be brought before a judge within 48 hours of their arrest and may not be held more than 28 days without being charged with a crime. In practice authorities often detained persons suspected of crimes for much longer periods. 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. Authorities did not promptly inform detainees of the charges against them and often changed the charges during the course of detainment. Detainees in prisons often did not have access to counsel or appear before a judge, and incommunicado detention was widespread, although detainees in police stations generally had access to legal representation and family members. Authorities provided indigent detainees with counsel on an irregular basis. There was a functioning bail system, except for cases involving national security or crimes that could carry the death penalty.” [4]] (section 1d)

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Torture in police detention

8.04 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated:

“The law and ratified but unimplemented constitution prohibit torture; however, there were numerous reports that security forces resorted to torture and physical beatings of prisoners, particularly during interrogations. There were credible reports that several military conscripts died following such treatment. Security forces severely mistreated and beat army deserters, draft evaders, persons attempting to flee the country without travel documents and exit permits, and members of certain religious groups...no known action was taken during the year to punish perpetrators of torture and abuse.” [4j] (section 1c)

8.05 The Amnesty International 2009 Annual Report, published in May 2009, added:

“Conditions of detention in Eritrea remained harsh and prisoners were regularly tortured or otherwise ill-treated [in 2008]. A common reported method of punishment over recent years has been tying detainees in painful positions known as the ‘helicopter’ and the ‘eight’. Prisoners have also frequently been left exposed to the sun for extended periods, or locked in metal shipping containers which magnify extremes of heat and cold. Many detainees were held in crowded underground cells without access to daylight. Conditions were unhygienic and damp, with no water for washing or cleaning. Prisoners were underfed and received unclean drinking water. There was almost no medical assistance available.” [5k]

See [Torture in military detention](#)

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ARMED FORCES

8.06 The number of military personnel as regular soldiers is not given in the Central Intelligence Agency’s World Factbook section on Eritrea (3 September 2009 version), though it estimates that of the 2.2 million military service reservists and current military conscripts, about 1.7 million are fit for military service. [28] (p11). Europa Online (accessed on 14 September 2009) estimated that Eritrea’s armed forces “were estimated to number 201,750, including an army of about 200,000, a navy of 1,400 and an air force of about 350; reserve forces numbered about 120,000.” [1a]

8.07 The military chain of command is held by Jane’s Sentinel country risk assessment of Eritrea to be one of the most powerful political structures in Eritrea, with President Isaias Afewerki as Commander in Chief, since 2002, effectively by-passing the Defence Minister, Sibhat Efrem, and directly controlling operations through three top generals and the four regional military commanders. The President also has direct control of the National Security Office (the NSO), the security and intelligence service of Eritrea. [70b]

- 8.08 During the war for independence and for some time after, the armed forces of the EPLF operated without formal rankings and with improvised military clothing, equipment and weapons. The armed forces have had a hierarchy and standardised uniforms since 1995. [78] (International Encyclopedia of Uniform Insignia Around the World). Jane's Infantry Weapons 2006 - 2007 gives information about the national inventory of arms, listing AKMs, as types of assault rifle held [70a]; photographs of Sawa military training camp parades show squads with older weapons, typically with fixed bayonets. [29c] (Human Rights Watch, 13 January 2005)
- 8.09 An article in African Studies Review, April 2003, states that "Tigrinya is the language of military training and communication." [74] (p8)

See [Languages](#)

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Arbitrary arrest and detention

- 8.10 According to the US State Department Human Rights report for 2008, "the military has the authority to arrest and detain civilians." [4] (section 1d). Jane's *Sentinel* notes that the military forces, the National Security Office, and the Eritrean Police Force all have powers of arrest. [70b]. The main application of these powers is to enforce recruitment round-ups (*giffa*), with the US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stating that "security forces detained individuals for evading national service, generally for less than three days, and on other unspecified national security charges. Numerous detainees were arrested even if they had valid papers showing that they had completed, or were exempt from, national service." The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 further stated that "security forces also continued to detain and arrest the parents and spouses of individuals who evaded national service or fled the country." [4] (section 1d)

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Torture in military detention

- 8.11 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2009 "Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea" report 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." [29e] (p29-30)
- 8.12 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 reported that "security forces subjected deserters and draft evaders to such disciplinary actions as prolonged sun exposure in temperatures of up to 120 degrees Fahrenheit and the binding of hands, elbows, and feet for extended periods." [4] (section 1c)

- 8.13 The HRW 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report 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 often take place on a regular, often daily, basis. Beatings can occur before or after other forms of torture. [29e] (p30-32)
- 8.14 The US State Department 2006 International Religious Freedom report noted:
- “Some of the detainees reportedly have been rolled around in oil drums, abused by fellow prisoners, and the women sexually abused; some of the detainees reportedly suffer from partial paralysis and other physical injuries as a result of their torture. Other reports describe other individuals and groups in the military and national service who have been detained, harassed, and physically tortured for practicing non-sanctioned religions.” [4e] (p4)

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Extrajudicial killings

- 8.15 Awate noted in an article on Eritrea's killing fields, dated 22 September 2007, gives examples of escapees being killed during border crossings in 2006 and 2007. For instance, it relates that:

“Two weeks ago, on 8 September 2007, omaal.org reported the following: On September 1, [2007] a young Eritrea man, Mateos [no last name given], was executed in a public square in Tessenei. His body was then handed over to his family which lives in the town. The family was given a stern warning by the authorities not to hold a public mourning.” [50ad]

- 8.16 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated that during 2008:

“The government continued to authorize the use of lethal force against individuals resisting or attempting to flee during military searches for deserters and draft evaders, and the practice reportedly resulted in deaths during the year [2008]. Several persons detained for evading national service died after harsh treatment by [the] security forces. There were reports that individuals were severely beaten and killed during roundups of young men and women for national service.” [4j] (section 1a)

AVENUES OF COMPLAINT

- 8.17 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated that during 2008 “there were no mechanisms to address allegations of official abuse, and impunity was a problem.” [4j] (section 1d)

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9. MILITARY AND NATIONAL SERVICE

LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

9.01 The National Service Proclamation (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 defines what national service is and involves:

“ ‘National Service’ will mean the general service that a citizen will give in active national service and in reserve military service’ meaning it covers both conscripts and reservists.

“ ‘Active National Service’ will mean the training [further referred to in the definitions as ‘Trainee’] and service that a citizen fit for national service under Art.8 of this proclamation will undergo for 18 months” – meaning both the military training period of six months and the service that is undertaken once training is over and work unit/work place assigned (also see paragraph 11.06). The ongoing State of Emergency allows the 18 months mentioned to be extended indefinitely at the work unit leader’s discretion. [13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)

9.02 The term “Reserve Military Service” is distinguished from “Reserve Army” in the definitions, with the latter being recalled specifically for military service in the regular armed forces in times of mobilization/emergency situations, and the former being recalled to do further national service duties indefinitely should there be mobilization/emergency situations, i.e. not necessarily as a combatant or with the armed forces. [13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995). As there is an ongoing state of emergency, recall is possible and has happened since 2005. [50j] (Awate, 24 February 2006); [50x] (Awate, 25 June 2007)

9.03 Article 6 of the Proclamation states:

“Under this Proclamation any Eritrean citizen from 18 to 50 years of age has the obligation of carrying out national service”, meaning, both, or either “Active National Service” and/or national service as in “Reserve Military Service”. [13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)

9.04 Article 8 of the Proclamation sets out details of national service:

“Under this Proclamation 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 services Training Center and 12 months of active military service and development tasks in military forces for a total of 18 months.” [13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)

- 9.05 Article 8 of the Proclamation lags behind developments:
- the education system was restructured in 2006 and 2007 to feed into basic training conscription, rather than through recruitment offices (Awate, 20 January 2008) [50ak];
 - the 12 months of military service and development tasks has been subsumed into the *warsai* system of work units, where the conscript may be doing active national service in public service rather than with the military forces. (Awate, 4 July 2007) [50aa]
- 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”. 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 The student concessions of Article 14 have been superceded by the restructuring of the education system. Article 15 deals with medical exemptions. Article 16 simply notes that the Ministry of Defence decides who is fit to serve as a trainee, and where they go to complete Active National Service. Likewise in Article 18, the Ministry decides regarding individuals’ problems with length and nature of national service. [13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)
- See [Exemptions](#)
- 9.08 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.” [13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)
- See [Demobilisation](#)
- 9.09 Article 21(1) sets out the special obligation under a State of Emergency, stating:
- “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)
- 9.10 Chapter III, Articles 23 to 32 relate to the Reserve Army. [13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)

- 9.11 Chapter IV, Articles 33 to 38 relate to Various Provisions, which include:
- Art. 34(12) “The Ministry of Defence in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ensures the enforcement of the duty of National Service relating to citizens in foreign countries.” [13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)
 - Art. 37 sets out penalties for evading national service including (3) Escape from National Service, which sets a mandatory five-year imprisonment (or imprisonment to the age of 50) on evaders of national service who do not return before the age of 40 years of age. [13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)

See [Exemptions: Exit-Entry procedures](#)

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MILITARY/NATIONAL SERVICE IN PRACTICE

- 9.12 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 added:
- “The government required all men between the ages of 18 and 50 and women between the ages of 18 and 47 to participate in the national service program, which included military training and civilian work programs. Increasing reports indicate citizens were enlisted in the national service for many years below minimum-wage rates with no prospective end date. The government justifies its open-ended draft on the basis of the undemarcated border with Ethiopia. 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; the government required them to forfeit to the government any money they earned above and beyond that salary. Government employees generally were unable to leave their jobs or take new employment. Draft evaders often were used as laborers on government development projects.” [4j] (section 5)
- 9.13 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report added:
- “Enforced indefinite national service is an increasingly important element of Eritrea’s human rights crisis. Conscripts undergo military training, in itself not illegal. However, they are subjected to cruel military punishments and torture...many may be deployed in what constitutes illegal forced labor. [29e] (p41)
- “...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. [29e] (p43-44)

“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. [29e] (p44)

“At the time of writing, most of the able-bodied adult population is on active, indefinite, compulsory national service or on reserve duty. The only exceptions are on health grounds, or, for women, pregnancy. In discussions with visiting members of the European Parliament, Eritrean government officials, ‘admitted that military service, although formally to last 18 months, often extends over decades, reducing both the active workforce and the individual freedom and choices of the citizens.’ ” [29e] (p44)

See [Illegal exit from Eritrea](#)

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PENALTIES FOR EVADING NATIONAL SERVICE

- 9.14 Article 37 (Penalties) of the National Service Proclamation lists a range of sanctions which exist for avoiding national service:

“Any violation of this Proclamation may be punished under more severe penalties contained in Eritrea’s criminal law. Violations of the Proclamation can be punished by imprisonment of up to two years or up to 3,000 Nakfa pecuniary penalty or both. To avoid national service by deceit or self-inflicted injury the same penalties apply, followed by national service. If the self-inflicted injury precludes national service, the prison term is extended to three years. Those who travel abroad to avoid national service who return before they are 40 years of age must then undertake national service; those who return after that age, are punished by imprisonment of five years and lose rights to own a business license or apply for an exit visa, land ownership or a job. Those who assist others in avoiding national service can receive two years’ imprisonment and/or a fine.” [13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995)

- 9.15 According to a letter from the British Embassy in Asmara dated 13 June 2008:

“Eritreans will flee the country to avoid military and national service, with [a] mandatory prison [sentence] awaiting those who try and dodge it. Journalists and political opponents are especially harshly repressed and sometimes die in detention camps.

“...people caught fleeing will get at least two years in prison if they have completed military service. Those who have not done military service will be imprisoned for up to a month and then sent to military training camps.

“People with no papers for national service can be taken from [the] streets anytime to military camps with strong punishments. It is not uncommon for women to be taken from the streets – far more likely if you are male.” [10g]

- 9.16 Credible reports indicate that draft evaders have been ill-treated in detention centres, as noted in the US State Department Human Rights report for 2008:

“There were credible reports that detention center conditions for persons temporarily held for evading military service were also harsh and life-threatening. Allegations from various sources suggested there may be 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. Some detainees reportedly suffered from severe mental and physical stress due to these conditions. There were also reports of multiple deaths at the W’ia military camp due to widespread disease and lack of medical care.” [4j] (section 1c)

- 9.17 An “Eritrea Daily” report, dated 18 December 2008, stated that mutinying Eritrean army units had freed 618 people from a prison located in the South administrative zone. The people released were the parents of children subject to military service. The report explained that:

“The parents were jailed for failing and in many cases even for simply refusing to pay an arbitrary punitive fine of 50,000 Nakfa imposed on them for not disclosing the whereabouts of their children who were being sought out for conscription in the military.

“...according to local reports, the mutinying units used military force to free the jailed parents only after prison guards declined calls to let the prisoners go free voluntarily.” [38c]

- 9.18 The HRW 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report added:

“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. [29e] (p45)

“...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.” [29e] (p46)

9.19 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 further stated:

“Security forces also continued to detain and arrest the parents and spouses of individuals who evaded national service or fled the country. [4j] (section 1d)

“...security forces continued to detain and arrest parents of individuals who evaded national service duties or fled the country, along with their family members; however, unlike in previous years, there were no reports that such parents were fined or forced to turn their children in to the government. Government officials entered households and confiscated the property and livestock of draft evaders.” [4j] (section 1f)

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ROUND-UPS (GIFFA)

9.20 The enlistment of persons eligible for national service is carried out through the means of round-ups, which are known in Eritrea as “Giffa”. Round-ups involve house and workplace searches as well as road blocks, and are reportedly carried out by the police and the military. In February 2006, a round-up in the Anseba region took place which included a sweep of all high schools in the region. All students in grades 10 and 11 who were 17 years or older were taken by bus to Wia, which is a military training camp. [68f] (Canadian IRB, Response to Information Request, 28 February 2007)

9.21 The HRW 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report noted:

“Conscription is generally managed by local councils, the smallest units of local administration, sometimes referred to as *kebelle*, 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. [29e] (p48)

“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.” [29e] (p49)

9.22 The AI report for 2005 stated that:

“In July and again in November 2005 in the Debub region in the south, parents and other relatives of individuals who had evaded conscription or fled the country were arrested and accused of complicity. They were only released if they deposited a bond of between 10,000 and 50,000 nakfas (US\$660–US\$3,000 equivalent) to produce the missing family member.” [5r].

- 9.23 Further details of the Dehub arrests of parents are given in an account by Awate, dated 17 July 2005. The Awate account also reports that “the government has also initiated targeted campaigns to apprehend female students who have completed 11th grade but opted to stay at home instead of reporting to Sawa...last week [10 July 2005 onwards] the town of Dekemhare was the target. Similar campaigns are expected in Asmara and other major towns.” [50i]
- 9.24 Arrests of parents and other relatives of persons who had evaded national service or had fled the country continued in 2006, as noted in the US State Department Human Rights report for 2007:
- “[The security forces] continued the practice, begun in 2005, of detaining and arresting parents and spouses of individuals who had evaded national service duties or fled the country, although there is nothing in the legal code to authorize such arrests. Numerous family members arrested during security force operations in December 2006 remained in detention at year’s end, reportedly under harsh conditions. There were reports of family members being fined in lieu of imprisonment.” [4h] (p3)
- “...during the year [2007] the government also detained spouses of individuals who had evaded national service or fled the country, and the government prevented spouses of such individuals from departing the country.” [4h] (section 1f)
- 9.25 Awate ran reports on 24 February 2006 that a new round of *giffa* had been launched in the Anseba region, which included the sweeping up of 17-year-olds from three high schools in Keren, transporting them to Wia (on the eastern coast). Other high schools in the northern Red Sea region were similarly cleared a few days previously. [50j]
- 9.26 Amnesty International (AI) reported on in December 2006 that over 500 relatives of young people missing from conscription were arrested in Asmara, as part of a *giffa* that started on 6 December 2006. The AI report added “the authorities have stated that the detainees must either produce the missing conscripts or pay a fine of 50,000 nafka (approximately US\$1,200). Relatives who fail to do so will be forced to serve six months in the army in place of their missing family member.” AI is concerned that this is a new development that cuts into the principle of individual penal responsibility. [5e]
- 9.27 On 22 May 2008, Awate reported that eight military brigades were brought into Asmara to conduct round-ups. The article states that two types of young people were being targeted: “the *koblelti* - those who are registered for national service but take a leave of absence without permission from their supervisors - and the *lieli Edme* - those who are over the age of conscription but have not voluntarily signed up.” The article also states: “In addition to the youth, the government of Eritrea is rounding up all Ethiopians, regardless of their age. Some of the Ethiopian women who were rounded up had to leave their dependent children unattended at their homes. Women and underage children are being held at the Enda Seal (TB Center) detention center at Maytemenay.” [50am]

- 9.28 A military round-up took place in May 2009, according to an Awate report, which stated that the:

“Eritrean government has rounded up thousands of Eritreans, mostly the youth, from the environs of Asmara. Eyewitnesses report that many youngsters who were fleeing from the military police (MPs) were beaten cruelly to the extent of being hospitalised...the odd thing about the annual roundups is that they occur during the Eritrean tourism season (May-August) and many devoted government supporters in the Disapora, having witnessed the cruelty of the roundups and the dire condition of their families, come back disillusioned with the government they support.” [50d]

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CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

- 9.29 According to the War Resisters' International report “Refusing to Bear Arms”, published in 1998, there is no legal provision for conscientious objection in Eritrea. [23a]. This information is corroborated by an Amnesty International press release, dated 13 June 2008, which stated that there is “no limit on [the] length of [national] service. There is no exemption for conscientious objectors, and no alternative non-military service.” [5f]. The HRW 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report affirms the above by stating that the “National Service Proclamation of 1995 makes no provision for conscientious objection to military service.” [29e] (p47)
- 9.30 Groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and other individuals who refuse to perform national service, have suffered human rights abuses, as reported in the US State Department Human Rights report for 2008:

“The government continued to harass, detain, and discriminate against Jehovah's Witnesses because of their refusal, on religious grounds, to vote in the independence referendum and the refusal of some to perform national service. Although members of several religious groups, including Muslims, reportedly have been imprisoned in past years for failure to participate in national military service, the government singled out Jehovah's Witnesses for harsher treatment than that received by followers of other faiths for similar actions.” [4j] (section 2c)

- 9.31 The Eritrean Anti-Militarism Initiative and Connection, affiliated to the German chapter of War Resisters' International have collated both key reports on military service in Eritrea, and the testimony of escapees from Eritrean military detention facilities. [23b] (Eritrea: Conscientious Objection and Desertion, 2005); [23c] (Conscientious Objection and Desertion in Eritrea, December 2005). The testimonies include objection after suffering battlefield shock in 2000, leading to torture and punishment duties [23b] (p5); escape in 2000 of a female recruit who had been pushed into front-line service, and punished with illegal extended service, punishment duties, and sexual harassment by the unit commander [23b] (p6,7); a soldier, recruited in 1997, who was arrested for imputed political opinion in August 2002 and tortured [23b] (p8); a military policeman, detailed as such from 2002, who had to pursue escapees and draft evaders, and then escaped himself after being called up for duty on the front line at the Ethiopian border during a tense period [23b] (p9); a recruit who objected after two years' military service, and was then subjected to punishment duties and torture in 1999 [23b] (p10); and a female recruit, forced into military service below age at Sawa in 2003, and who witnessed the torture and rape of female Jehovah's Witnesses and evangelicals. [23b] (p11)

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SCHOOL LEAVERS AND CONSCRIPTION

- 9.32 The HRW 2009 "Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea" report 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. [29e] (p50)

"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. [29e] (p50)

"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. [29e] (p50)

“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.” [29e] (p50-51)

9.33 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated that:

“The government required all students who reached the final year of secondary school to attend school at a location adjacent to the Sawa military training facility in the western section of the country. Students who did not attend this final year did not graduate and could not sit for examinations that determined eligibility for advanced education. The remote location of this boarding school, security concerns, and societal attitudes reportedly resulted in many female students not enrolling for their final year; however, women could earn an alternative secondary school certificate by attending night school after completing national service. Many students elected to repeat grades or dropped out of high school after the 11th grade to avoid forced conscription into the Sawa military education.

“...attendance at Sawa is compulsory and those who do not attend remain at risk of arrest. Students at Sawa are typically 18 or older, although a fair percentage are as young as 16. The initial three months of June through August are spent undergoing military training. Students who receive poor grades in high school have in the past been sent to the Wi’a military training camp in lieu of being allowed to complete the academic year.” [4j] (section 5)

9.34 Awate reported on 28 March 2007 that a circular had been issued by the Government to the Sawa camp authorities outlining measures designed to curb desertion that included limiting visits by parents, promoting “revolutionary and patriotic fervour”, and the banning of mobile phones. [50y]

9.35 The AI report of 7 December 2005 further stated “in January 2004, the UNICEF representative in Eritrea was reported to have expressed concern that the militarization of education was a violation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which aims to promote the best interests of the child, because it resulted in the separation of children from their families and forced them into a military environment.” [5i]. The Awate report of the February 2006 *giffas* concludes “One alarming aspect of this new wave of roundups is that it has affected young students under 18 years of age.” [50j]

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EXEMPTIONS

Overview

- 9.36 An Awate article of 23 October 2007 about national service stated that, according to the national service proclamation, there are only four classes of people exempted from national service:

“Only four classes of Eritreans are exempted from National Service: (1) Those who already gave national service prior to the promulgation of the law and (2) ‘fighters and armed peasants who have proved to have spent all their time in the liberation struggle’; (3) those who, for health reasons, are unable to participate in the national service (but are still required to participate in 18 months of public service.) and (4) those participating in an approved educational programme.” [50v] (Awate, 23 October 2007)

- 9.37 The Awate article of 23 October 2007 further stated that:

“National Service was presented as a noble duty on all citizens and only requiring 18 months of sacrifice. But the proclamation has an escape clause: 18 months of service unless [word underlined in text of source] Eritrea is facing mobilization or a state of emergency. And the nation, mostly due to the rash decision of its self-declared leaders, has been in an undeclared state of emergency for more than half of its existence now. Consequently, most of the National Service members have been pressed into service now for 5, 8 and 10 years.

“...the Proclamation speaks of non-existing institutions like the ‘ministry of local government’ and ‘board’ that is supposed to have oversight over the proclamation. But ever since the arrest of Mahmoud Sheriffo, the ministry of local government has been dissolved and its functions divided up among the military command zones and their ‘desks.’ The board was supposed to review applications for exemptions from applicants claiming exemption from the service. This is now done by the generals who require huge fees and bribes to bestow the ‘unfit’ certificate on the children of parents with means.” [50v] (Awate, 23 October 2007)

Exemptions of women

- 9.38 Within the text of the National Service Proclamation, there is no reference to any gender differences in any of the provisions. [13] (National Service Proclamation of 23 October 1995). In general, documents make mention of various “exemptions” regarding women as conscripts, such as Muslim women, nursing mothers/women with children/married women, and women over the age of 27. Confusion over whether Muslim women were obliged to perform National Service has stemmed from news articles (Awate, 16 February 2006) in 2006 that reported that the Eritrean authorities had stirred up resentment and some protest in the Raishida communities, as they pursued round-ups and enforced conscription. [50j]
- 9.39 The Amnesty International report “ ‘You have no right to ask’ – Government resists scrutiny on human rights” report, published in May 2004, stated:
- “This [gender equality in recruitment and military obligations] was reflected in the terms of national service after independence, which was established for men and women equally, although there is considerable resistance to female recruitment from Muslim communities, especially among the Afar of Dankalia region on the Red Sea coast. Resistance on the grounds of religious belief, cultural traditions of family honour, or protecting women from sexual harassment and violence in the army, sometimes led to violent confrontations during conscription round-ups. The government appears to have subsequently stopped forcible recruitment of young Muslim women in these areas.” [5c] (p21)
- 9.40 Information on this issue comes from an AI report of December 2005:
- “Exemptions from national service include provisions for the disabled, for mothers while they are breast-feeding, on medical grounds, and for a family to retain a young person to remain to help at home when all other siblings have been conscripted. In Muslim areas in the east, female recruitment is said to have ceased on account of substantial opposition on grounds of customary and religious beliefs.” [5i] (p15)
- 9.41 The Canadian IRB noted in a Response to Information request, dated 28 January 2008, on whether women are discharged upon marrying:
- “Information on whether women serving in the military are discharged when they marry was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. During a meeting with the Research Directorate at the Eritrean embassy in Ottawa, a consular officer indicated that women in the military who marry are discharged (15 Jan. 2008). In such cases, women must provide their marriage certificate in order to obtain their discharge documents (Eritrea 15 Jan. 2008).” [68h]

- 9.42 The idea of 27 as an upper age limit for women to do National Service appears in documents around 2003. Prior to 2002, most documents reflect an upper age limit of 40. In 2007 and 2008, documents have increased the age limit. Amnesty International reported on 7 December 2005 that:
- “In late 2004 the upper age limit for female conscription was reportedly reduced to 27 years. There are also military reserve duties between the ages of 40 and 50 for former EPLF veterans and former conscripts. National service has been made more military in nature and extended indefinitely as a result of the failure of the border demarcation process and corresponding fears of renewed armed conflict with Ethiopia...exemptions from national service include provision for the disabled, for mothers while they are breast feeding, on medical grounds, and for a family to retain a young person to remain at home when all other siblings have been conscripted.” [5l]
- 9.43 Prior to the 2007 report, the US State Department reports on human rights practices in Eritrea, archived on the US State Department website at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/> stated:
- “The law requires that women ages 18 to 27 participate in national service.” (2003) to (2006)
- But prior to the 2003 report ran:
- “The law requires that women between the ages of 18 and 40 participate in the national service program.” (USSD Human Rights report for 2002); (USSD Human Rights report for 2001); (USSD Human Rights report for 1999)
- 9.44 The upper age limit of 47 for women is also found in the BBC’s Peter Martell’s farewell report from Asmara, published on 10 March 2008, stating “many are conscripted for decades - men until the age of 50 and women until 47 - on salaries of less than \$1 a day.” [8l]
- 9.45 Amnesty International’s International Annual Report 2008, covering events in 2007, mentioned an age differential between male and female conscripts:
- “National military service, in the army or in civilian occupations under military conditions, was indefinite, and was justified by the government because of the military threat from Ethiopia. Military service was compulsory for all citizens aged 18 to 40, with few exemptions allowed. People aged 40 to 50 or who had been demobilized had reserve duties. Women over the age of 27 were informally exempted.” [5a]
- 9.46 However, the AI 2003 report, covering the year 2002 stated:
- “National military and development service, indefinitely extended since 1994, is compulsory for 18 months for men and women aged between 18 and 40, with additional compulsory reserve duties afterwards for all conscripts and demobilized former EPLF fighters.” [5n]

- 9.47 Likewise, previous AI reports, such as 'You have no right' (May 2004) stated:
- "Under the revised national service regulations of 23 October 1995, national service is compulsory for all citizens aged between 18 and 40 years, male and female." It does not mention any upper age limit for women at all. [5c]
- 9.48 As regards the upper age limit for female conscription, AI stated in its December 2005 report, that "in late 2004 the upper age limit for female conscription was reportedly reduced to 27 years." [5I]
- 9.49 Sara Rich Dorman, University of Edinburgh, in a paper, 'Past the Kaleshnikov: Youth, Politics and the State in Eritrea', of June 2004 wrote that:
- "The programme involved all 'youth' between the ages of 18 and 40 training at the Sawa Military Camp for 6 months (military service), followed by 12 months of work in various ministries (national service) at a nominal wage." [58]
- 9.50 The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in a letter dated 13 June 2008, answered the question of female conscription directly, stating that "the age for military then national service is from 18 to 57 for men and 18 to 47 for women. ...women do routinely perform active national service over the age of 27." Women over the age of 27 are unlikely to have to undergo military training if they had not done so already. The letter added "married women and mothers should be exempt from military service and able to leave Eritrea before the age of 47, although [this] is sometimes not the case." The letter also added that the requirements set out for female conscripts are applied fairly consistently. [10g]

Exemptions on medical grounds

- 9.51 The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in a letter dated 1 February 2006, added further details regarding medical exemption:
- "...if Eritreans are claiming exemption from military service on medical grounds, they are required to go before a medical board (which consists of military doctors at Sawa), who would then issue a certificate of medical condition assessment by the medical board. This certificate would then be given by the individual to the military authorities who would use it to issue the military exemption certificate. If the individual has attended a medical board at Sawa and subsequently been deemed exempt from military service on medical grounds they remain exempt indefinitely". [10e]
- 9.52 The Awate article of 23 October 2007 suggested that corruption has entered into the process of granting medical exemptions:
- "The Proclamation speaks of non-existing institutions like the 'ministry of local government' and 'board' that is supposed to have oversight over the proclamation. But ever since the arrest of Mahmoud Sheriffo, the ministry of local government has been dissolved and its functions divided up among the military command zones and their 'desks'. The board was supposed to review applications for exemptions from applicants claiming exemption from the service. This is now done by the generals who require huge fees and bribes to bestow the 'unfit' certificate on the children of parents with means." [50v]

- 9.53 The HRW 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report added:

“ ‘Psychological derangement’ (article 14, 5.1[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 ‘*lew’t*’ and only known in the camps.” [29e] (p48)

MILITARY TRAINING

- 9.54 Awate reported on 4 July 2007 that the graduating class of military training from Sawa, the 20th round, had told their parents “harrowing stories” of the camp’s conditions, stating:

“The Sawa regiment, which is designed to build what the army calls *texawarnetn miximamn* (endurance and stamina), includes long *gu’ezo egri* (walks), idleness and a starvation diet. The students wake up at 4:30 AM and are given their first meal at noon. Their most bitter complaint is about the state of healthcare at Sawa. They report that no one is referred to the hospital even if his or her situation is very critical. Any one who is suffering from falciparum and plasmodium (malaria), pneumonia or a spasm is given a pain killer. Some report of avoidable deaths and delirium that occurred due to negligence and last-minute referrals to Keren hospital.” [50aa]

- 9.55 The 10 December 2006 Awate report noted that:

“The 8-month military training consisted of long marches, requiring the conscripts to walk up to 40 kilometers per day in the harsh climate. The training is not designed to convert civilians into fighting machines but to break the spirit of a youth which daily plots to find a way to escape.” [50p] (p2)

- 9.56 An Agence France Presse article of 1 March 2007 gives a figure for the recruits’ pay: “Basic recruits are paid a salary of just 150 Nakfa (\$10) a month.” [66b]

- 9.57 Awate previously reported on 25 June 2007 that National Service conscripts not on ‘active’ military duty were being called up for ‘refresher’ military training at Wi’a training camp, stating:

“The call applies to all ‘national service’ members, known locally as *agelgelot*, who are not in ‘active’ military duty. This means that the directive is applicable to recruits of the first round (‘*zuria*’) trained in 1995, all the way to the fourteenth round.” [50x]

- 9.58 Awate reported on 4 July 2007 that the 21st round of recruits “were sent from Asmara today to Sawa. Following the Government’s decision to centralize the location of the 12th grade at Sawa, all students who completed 11th grade are sent, willingly or unwillingly, to Sawa.” On the issue of leave for conscripts, the Awate article of 4 July 2007 hints that there is a period of leave between Sawa and taking up active National Service, but that it can be of a short duration, giving the example “Of the graduating batch, the girls have been told to report to Kifli Serawit (army) in Barentu in Western Eritrea within 20 days.” [50aa]
- 9.59 A Canadian IRB Request for Information response, dated 28 January 2008, about military identification documents, stated:

“Information on military identification documents was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. During a meeting with the Research Directorate at the Eritrean embassy in Ottawa, a consular officer indicated that she was aware of the existence of a military identity card (15 Jan. 2008). She noted that it is a green card but could not provide further details about this document (Eritrea 15 January 2008). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.” [68i]

DETENTION OF NATIONAL SERVICE AND MILITARY SERVICE CONSCRIPTS

- 9.60 The HRW 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report 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. [29e] (p27)

“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. [29e] (p27)

“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. [29e] (p27-28)

“...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.” [29e] (p28-29)

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DEMOBILISATION

- 9.61 The Proclamation on National Service allows for demobilisation. Article 20 of the Proclamation, which covers discharge from national service states that:
- “Except for cases provided for in ART 21 (1) of this Proclamation citizens who conclude the Active National Service period are discharged from duty. On the basis of directives issued by the Ministry of Defence citizens on Active National Service may be discharged before their term is due. In accordance with this article the Ministry of Defence provides citizens who are discharged from Active National Service with discharge certification and their level of preparation.” [13]
- 9.62 The US State Department Background Note on Eritrea, published in April 2009, stated:
- “The government has been slow to demobilize its military after the most recent 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.” [4a]
- 9.63 The Foreign Office, in a letter dated 1 February 2006, reported that: “the World Bank has been leading on a large demobilisation and reintegration project with support from e.g. The Netherlands and Norway. An element of the demobilisation component was the provision of cards to those who were finally demobilised from military/national service... anyone demobilised will have such a card and will be able to produce it to the military or police to prove their exemption. Progress on the whole project has been slow, with Eritrea saying that it cannot make better progress until its border with Ethiopia is demarcated.” [10e]
- 9.64 Awate reported on 24 February 2006 that “all demobilized soldiers and members of the national service to get ready for reporting to Sawa... those called for ‘national service’ include athletes and other youngsters active in various sports, who had been given permit[s] to pursue their sporting activities. Demobilized soldiers and national service corps who had been discharged for medical reasons (‘Medical Board cases’) were also ordered to reregister.” [50j]
- 9.65 The Jane’s *Sentinel* country risk assessment for Eritrea summary on national and military service, updated 9 November 2007, noted:
- “Plans to move ahead with demobilisation have not in fact been implemented and the level of militarization in Eritrea remains high. National service through conscription, of both men and women between the ages of 18 and 40, has been extended indefinitely.” [70b]

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10. JUDICIARY

ORGANISATION

- 10.01 Freedom House's entry on Eritrea in the 'Freedom in the World' 2009 report, published in July 2009, noted that the judiciary was formed by decree in 1993, and has "never issued rulings significantly at variance with government positions." [36] (p3). Europa Online (accessed on 14 September 2009) stated that:

"The judicial system operates on the basis of transitional laws which incorporate pre-independence laws of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, revised Ethiopian laws, customary laws and post-independence enacted laws. The independence of the judiciary in the discharge of its functions is unequivocally stated in Decree No. 37, which defines the powers and duties of the Government. It is subject only to the law and to no other authority. The court structure is composed of first instance sub-zonal courts, appellate and first instance zonal courts, appellate and first instance high courts, a panel of high court judges, presided over by the President of the High Court, and a Supreme Court presided over by the Chief Justice, as a court of last resort. The judges of the Supreme Court are appointed by the President of the State, subject to confirmation by the National Assembly." [1a]

- 10.02 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 added that:

"The judicial system consists of civilian courts and 'special courts.' The civilian court system includes community courts, regional courts, and the High Court, which also serves as an appellate court. Appeals can be made in the civilian courts up to the High Court. Minor infractions involving sums of less than approximately 110,000 nakfa (\$7,300) are brought to community courts. More serious offenses are argued before regional courts, but the High Court is the court of first instance for a significant proportion of cases involving murder, rape, and other felonies. A single judge hears all cases except those argued before the High Court, where panels of three judges hear cases. A panel of five judges hears cases in which the High Court serves as the court of final appeal.

"The executive-controlled special courts issue directives to other courts regarding administrative matters, although their domain was supposed to be restricted to criminal cases involving capital offenses, theft, embezzlement, and corruption. The Office of the Attorney General decides which cases are to be tried by a special court. No lawyers practice in the special courts. The judges serve as the prosecutors and may request that individuals involved in the cases present their positions. The special courts, which do not permit defense counsel or the right of appeal, allowed the executive branch to mete out punishment without regard for due process. Most trials in special courts were not open to the public.

“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. There was no limitation on punishment, although the special courts did not hand down capital punishment sentences during the year. The attorney general allowed special courts to retry civilian court cases, including those decided by the High Court, thereby subjecting defendants to double jeopardy. In rare instances appeals made to the Office of the President reportedly resulted in special courts rehearing certain cases.” [4j] (section 1e)

- 10.03 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2006 previously observed that “Shari’a law for family and succession cases could be applied when both litigants in civil cases were Muslims. In these cases, the sentences imposed cannot involve physical punishment.” [4k] (section 1e). A *Shabait* (state media) article of 26 December 2006 reported that the Eritrean Ministry of Justice had begun entering into discussions about integrating Eritrean customary laws into the formal legislative system. [26b]

INDEPENDENCE

- 10.04 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated that:

“The law and unimplemented constitution provide for an independent judiciary; however, the judiciary was weak and subject to executive control. Judicial corruption remained a problem. The judicial process was influenced by patronage of former fighters who in many cases were judges themselves. 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.” [4j] (section 1e)

- 10.05 Travel Document Systems, undated, accessed in August 2008, supports the US State Department view quoted above, stating:

“Nominally the judiciary operates independently of both the legislative and executive bodies, with a court system that extends from the village through to the district, provincial, and national levels. However, in practice, the independence of the judiciary is limited. In 2001, the president of the High Court was detained after criticizing the government for judicial interference.” [95]

FAIR TRIAL

- 10.06 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated that:

“The judiciary suffered from a lack of trained personnel, inadequate funding, and poor infrastructure that limited the government’s ability to grant accused persons a speedy and fair trial. Public trials were held, but no cases involving individuals detained for national security or political reasons were brought to trial. 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 impact on the judiciary. The government has not issued licenses to lawyers wishing to enter private practice for nine years.” [4j] (section 1e)

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11. ARREST AND DETENTION – LEGAL RIGHTS

11.01 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated that:

“The law stipulates that detainees must be brought before a judge within 48 hours of their arrest and may not be held more than 28 days without being charged with a crime. In practice [the] authorities often detained suspects for much longer periods. 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. Authorities did not promptly inform detainees of charges against them and often changed the charges during the course of detainment. Detainees in prisons often did not have access to counsel or appear before a judge, and incommunicado detention was widespread, although detainees in police stations generally had access to legal representation and family members. Authorities provided indigent detainees with counsel on an irregular basis. There was a functioning bail system, except for persons charged with national security crimes or crimes that could carry the death penalty.

“Security force personnel detained individuals for evading national service, generally for fewer than three days, and on other unspecified national security charges. Numerous detainees were arrested even if they had valid papers showing that they had completed, or were exempt from, national service.

“Security forces also continued to detain and arrest the parents and spouses of individuals who evaded national service or fled the country.” [4j] (section 1d)

See also [Arbitrary Arrest and Detention](#)

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12. PRISON CONDITIONS

12.01 The Human Rights Watch 2009 World report stated that

“Detention conditions are harsh. There are generally no trials or terms of confinement; detention lasts as long as the government chooses. No independent monitoring organization has access to Eritrean prisons. Former detainees and guards report that prisoners are packed into unventilated cargo containers under extreme temperatures or are held in dark and cramped underground cells. Torture is common, as are indefinite solitary confinement, starvation rations, lack of sanitation and medical care, and hard labor. Of 31 political leaders and journalists arrested in 2001, nine are reported to have died. Other deaths in captivity have been reported.” [29d]

12.02 The AI report 2008 added that:

“Torture by means of painful tying, known as ‘helicopter’ continued to be a routine punishment and means of interrogation for religious and political prisoners. Members of evangelical churches were tortured to try to make them abandon their faith. Military offenders were tortured. Many were young people who had tried to flee conscription or who had complained of harsh conditions and the indefinite extension of their national service. Prison conditions were extremely harsh and constituted cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Many prisoners were held in shipping containers, which were overcrowded and unhygienic with no toilet or washing facilities, and varied between extremes of heat and cold. Medical treatment was rarely provided.” [5a]

12.03 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated that:

“Conditions for the general prison population were harsh and life-threatening [in 2008]. There were reports that prisoners were held in underground cells or in shipping containers with little or no ventilation in extreme temperatures. The shipping containers were reportedly not large enough to allow all of those incarcerated together to lie down at the same time.

“There were credible reports that detention center conditions for persons temporarily held for evading military service were also harsh and life-threatening. Allegations from various sources suggested there may be hundreds of such detainees. Draft evaders were reportedly sent to the Wi'a military camp, where typically they were beaten. Some were held 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. Some detainees reportedly suffered from severe mental and physical stress due to these conditions. There were also reports of multiple deaths at the Wi'a military camp due to widespread disease and lack of medical care.” [4j] (section 1c)

- 12.04 The HRW 2009 "Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea", report added:

"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. Many, if not most political prisoners and those detained for trying to flee the country or for practising 'illegal' religions are held incommunicado in appalling conditions, often underground or in metal shipping containers. [29e] (p34)

"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. [29e] (p34)

"...apart from torture and routine punishment, detainees in Eritrea's huge network of prisons endure terrible conditions, forced labor, and lethal starvation...the government appears completely unconcerned about detention facilities and the fate of the people in custody. Deaths in custody are common. Prison guards are often demoralized and appalled by what they are asked to do - some of them reportedly escape along with the inmates. [29e] (p35)

"...detainees described poor nutrition and starvation rations in most facilities. A man detained in Asmara's Track B prison for a day before he was transferred said he received a single biscuit. Other told Human Rights Watch they received one cup of water a day despite hot and overcrowded conditions. [29e] (p37)

"...detaining people underground appears to be a typical practice of the Eritrean government - much of the liberation struggle was fought from underground bunkers, some of which, it appears, have now become jails for the some of the very people who fought for freedom. 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." [29e] (p37)

- 12.05 The Suwera Centre for Human Rights report, "The State of Human Rights in Eritrea 2008", published in August 2009, added:

"There are no health facilities in Eritrean prisons especially at the secret locations. Prisoners do not get any medical attention even if they suffered from serious diseases which caused many deaths which remained secret. The prisoners are made to sleep on the ground or on small thin mats of woven palm leaves. Many are not allowed to use a pillow or any cover and this causes back and muscular ailments and pain for a long time. [22] (p24)

"Provision of food to prisoners consists of two little meals served daily without meat or vegetables. This makes the prisoners prone to many diseases due to malnutrition in addition to the physical and mental torture they were systematically subjected to and the denial to see their families. Some of the prisoners are detained in solitary confinement which makes it worse, besides they do not know for how long they will be detained." [22] (p25)

12.06 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 noted:

“During the year [2008] the government did not permit the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or any local human rights organizations to monitor federal, regional, or local prison conditions; however, the government granted the ICRC access to Ethiopian prisoners of war being detained in the country.

“Authorities generally permitted convicted criminals in federal, regional, and local prisons three visits per week by family members; however, persons detained, arrested, or convicted for reasons of national security or for evading national service were denied family visits.” [4j] (section 1c)

See [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#); [Children in judicial and penal systems](#)

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PLACES OF DETENTION

12.07 The following is a list of places of detention that have been mentioned in reports accessed but is not a complete or comprehensive list of all the Eritrean detention facilities:

Aderser. Military camp/training centre. Located 25 km from Sawa camp. [29e] (p93) (Human Rights Watch “Service for Life” report, April 2009).

Adi Abeto. Main prison for Asmara; also used as a processing centre to send prisoners elsewhere. 10 to 15 km north east of Asmara, off the road to Keren. [29e] (p93) (Human Rights Watch “Service for Life” report, April 2009). AI reported that Adi Abeto was the initial detention facility for the Maltese returns of 2002: women, children and those over the military service age of 40 were detained for several weeks, but the military deserters were held incommunicado and tortured, before being transferred to Dahlek Kebir. [5c] (p23). Shipping containers reported as being used as punishment blocks in this facility. [5c] (p16) (AI, May 2004). In April 2008, Awate reported “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. Those who do not have the means are sent to other prisons, like Track B [Tract B], an underground prison or, if they are in the military, they are referred to the military units, where they serve their terms. There is no court hearing, no police case and no documentation.” [50a] (Awate, 7 April 2008)

Adi Keih town prison. AI has reported this prison was used as an initial detention facility for draft evaders. [5h] (AI, 28 July 2005)

Adi Quala or Adi Qala. Military prison. Located 40 km north of Ethiopian border, off main road from Asmara through Mendefera. [29e] (p93) (Human Rights Watch “Service for Life” report, April 2009).

Agip, Asmara. The location, according to Reporters without Borders, of eight of the nine state media journalists arrested in November 2006. "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." [50s] (p2) (Awate, 3 December 2006)

Alla or Ala. Located 40 km from Asmara, near Dekemhare town. [29e] (p93) (Human Rights Watch "Service for Life" report, April 2009). Shipping containers reported as being used as punishment blocks in this facility. [5c] (p16) (AI, May 2004)

Assab Front (aka 'Gimbar'). Military prison in Assab. [29e] (p93) (Human Rights Watch "Service for Life" report, April 2009). Human Rights without Frontiers reported on 7 May 2003 that 74 soldiers were detained in Assab prison. The initial query claimed that the prison was known to house up to 5,000 prisoners and that it held soldiers that "ran afoul of their government". [61] (Human Rights Without Frontiers, May 2003)

Baharia Naval Base. Military facility. Massawa. [29e] (p94) (Human Rights Watch "Service for Life" report, April 2009).

Barantu. Barantu. Civilian prison. [29e] (p94) (Human Rights Watch "Service for Life" report, April 2009).

Dahlek Kebir. Dahlak islands. Maximum security civilian prison. [29e] (p94) (Human Rights Watch "Service for Life" report, April 2009). Detention and prison facilities built on the main Dahlek island in the Red Sea, with a capacity for 800 prisoners, and comprising eight large sheet-metal buildings. [5c] (p16) (AI, May 2004). It is where many of the detainees from the returns by Malta and Libya are thought to be imprisoned. [29c] (HRW 2005). AI reported that in December 2002, 95 civilians and 85 conscript deserters of the Maltese returns arrived in Dahlek Kebir, with the civilians transferred back to the mainland in July 2003. [5c] (p23) (AI, May 2004)

Duarwa. Located south of Asmara, on the road to Adi Quala before Adi Ugri. [29e] (p94) (Human Rights Watch "Service for Life" report, April 2009).

Eiraeiro, Filfil-Selomuna area north of the Asmara-Massawa road. A 'secret' prison for political prisoners. [50m] (Awate, 31 August 2006). It was purpose built in 2003, receiving the G15/G11 political prisoners from Embatkala in June 2003. It is reported to be comprised of five main blocks, with two main cell blocks, and 62 rooms used as cells; the standard cell size is 3 x 3 meters. [50m] (p2). The article claims there are 36 political prisoners, and names most of them, giving their cell numbers. [50m] (p2,3). Conditions are basic, and prisoners are chained and in solitary confinement. [50m] (p3-4). One-hundred-and-fifty guards and staff operate the prison; the guards are heavily vetted and monitored. [50m] (p4-5).

Galaalo military camp. Red Sea coast. Deaths of conscripted students reported in August 2001 while performing forced labour. [5c] (p20) (AI, May 2004)

Gedem prison. 40 km south of Massawa. It is alleged to be the site of forced labour in 2004, with the construction of a naval base, numbering 400 prisoners who received minimal food and water, no medical attention after injury and the use of confinement in shipping containers in excessive temperatures as punishment. [50f] (Ehrag section, Awate, 16 June 2006)

Ghatelay (Ghatielay). Military labour camp. About 40 to 45 km north west of Asmara, off main road to Massawa. [29e] (p94) (Human Rights Watch “Service for Life” report, April 2009).

Haddis Ma’askar. An army prison equipped with underground cells. [5c] (p16) (AI, May 2004)

Halhalas. Sub-provincial prison. Located 45 km from Asmara. Specifically for persons caught trying to cross the border. [29e] (p94) (Human Rights Watch “Service for Life” report, April 2009).

Kambo Ndafurstale. Sanafe town. Military jail. [29e] (p94) (Human Rights Watch “Service for Life” report, April 2009).

Klima. Near Assab. [29e] (p94) (Human Rights Watch “Service for Life” report, April 2009).

Mai Edaga, Decamhare town. Shipping containers reported as being used as punishment blocks in this facility. [5c] (p16) (AI, May 2004)

Mai Serwa military camp near Asmara. The camp is used for the detention of draft evaders, and uses metal shipping containers and underground cells. [5h] (AI, 28 July 2005). Human Rights without Frontiers locates Mai Serwa as near Keren, with the initial query stating that it is three storeys high with the main prison built underground. [68a] (Canadian IRB, 14 July 2003). AI reported in December 2005 that Helen Berhane, the Rema church gospel singer, “is held at Mai Serwa military camp near Asmara, in a metal shipping container with little ventilation that alternates between hot and cold temperature extremes and has no washing or toilet facilities.” [5i]. A Release Eritrea briefing, posted on 25 June 2005, adds that Helen Berhane had been caught listening to a radio and “as punishment she was transferred to an underground cell, where she was kept chained for two weeks.” Helen Berhane was released from prison in October 2006. [31h] (Release-Eritrea, 2 November 2006); [5o] (AI, 3 November 2006); [67c] (CSW, 3 November 2006). The AI report of 3 November 2006 notes that initially, Ms Berhane was hospitalised in Asmara, where she was confined to a wheelchair “due to the injuries she sustained to her feet and legs”. [5o]. On 22 October 2007, BBC News reported that Ms Berhane had been granted asylum in Denmark. [8n]

Mai Temenei. An army prison equipped with underground cells. [5c] (p16) (AI, May 2004). 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)”. [50am] (Awate, 22 May 2008)

Metkelabet. Located between Massawa and Asmara. Military prison belonging to the 32 division. [29e] (p94) (Human Rights Watch “Service for Life” report, April 2009).

Meiter. Awate mentioned Meiter on 10 July 2008 as a detention centre stating: “Of all the prisons they have designed, Meiter is the most inaccessible locality so far. Anyone once taken to Meiter will never ever be able either to communicate with his kin or flee from the place. It is so far from the nearest towns and too arid that even if you are allowed to go on your own, you will come back for fear of death due to thirst. These returnees, even if allowed to meet with their family for a fraction of a second, will move to that place in due time. The PFDJ will try any means to hoodwink the public till those remaining in Libya and Egypt come back. After all of them arrive, Meiter will be full to capacity.” [50ak] (Awate, 10 July 2008). Meiter was also mentioned in an Awate January 2008 report. [50an] (Awate, 3 January 2008)

Nakhura Island. Part of the Dahlak complex of prisons. Maximum security. [29e] (p95) (Human Rights Watch “Service for Life” report, April 2009).

Prima 1 +2. Military prison. [29e] (p95) (Human Rights Watch “Service for Life” report, April 2009).

Sawa Military Training Camp. Located along Sawa River, in far western Eritrea near the border with Sudan, about 10 km south of road midway between Sebderat and Hawashayt. [29e] (p95) (Human Rights Watch “Service for Life” report, April 2009). The complex includes the prison camp of Brigade Six, comprising temporary barracks built on a hilltop to the right of the main camp. According to the testimony of an ex-prisoner reproduced by Awate, “Sawa prison is made entirely of tin material” and thus insufferably hot in the day and cold at night. It comprises of 12 tin barrack blocks. Malnutrition, poor hygiene and lack of medical attention reported, with high levels of infections and diseases associated with poor living conditions. [50g] (Ehrag section, Awate, 25 April 2006). Photos of Sawa in 2000 and 2004 are to found in slide shows on the website of the National Union of Eritrean Youth Students (NUEYS) <http://www.denden.com/NUEYS/>. The USSD report for 2005 notes there were alleged cases of the rape and sexual abuse of female recruits by Sawa instructors. [4f] (p2, section 1c).

Sembel prison. Asmara. An officially designated prison for political prisoners. [5c] (p16) (AI, May 2004)

Tehadasso. Military prison. Shipping containers reported as being used as punishment blocks in this facility. [5c] (p16) (AI, May 2004)

Tessenei. Classed as ‘rehabilitation centre’. Military prison. Allegations of torture, beatings and general abuse reported in this facility. [5c] (p18) (AI, May 2004)

“Tract B”. Asmara. Military prison. It comprises of a former US storage facility near Asmara airport. [5c] (p16) (AI, May 2004). In late 2002, some EPLF veterans among the Maltese returnees were separated out at Adi Abeto and then sent to Tract B prison. [5c] (p23) (AI, May 2004)

Tsererat. Asmara. Military prison. “Mainly for EPLF veterans, held in underground cells.” [5c] (p16) (AI, May 2004)

Wengel Mermera (Wenjel Mirmera). Sources refer to this centre as being where most of the detainees of Asmara mass arrests are held, such as,

according to Release Eritrea "...the dungeon-like inner prison in Asmara where many of Eritrea's prominent political prisoners are also believed to be incarcerated." [31c] (Release Eritrea, 25 June 2005). The AI May 2004 report adds that it is a special security section in the 2nd police station, Asmara. [5c] (p16) (AI, May 2004). Compass Direct, April 2006, maintains that the 70 muslims arrested for protesting about the Government's imposition of a new chief mufti were detained in Wengel Mermera in one cell. [47a] (Compass Direct, July 2006)

Wi'ya/W'ia/Wieh. Military camp/training centre. Located on the Red Sea coast about 40 km south east of Massawa, off the road to Assab. [29e] (p95) (Human Rights Watch "Service for Life" report, April 2009). Temperatures in this area are often over 40 degrees centigrade. One hundred and twenty-one men, arrested during the mass arrests on 28 May 2005 at the Meserete/Full Gospel wedding, are still reported as being in detention in Wi'a. [46] (p2). The camp mainly processes youths detained in round-ups; the reports of the February 2006 *giffa* indicate that the Anseba region high school students were sent to Wi'a. [50j]. On 10 June 2005, a mass escape was attempted, and the authorities shot and killed 161 youths. [4f] (section 1a) (USSD report for 2005). In July and August 2007, the hot season, at least 16 people died from the effects of heat, and many dozens were hospitalised. [50ae] (Awate, 3 October 2007). The 3 October 2007 Awate report states that there is a specific camp for detained teachers and adds the details:

"Wia is not a single camp. It represents a cluster of several camps, including one used exclusively as a detention center. Among the commanders in Wia are: Lt. Col. Jemal, Lt. Col. Weddi Haile and Capt. Ramadan...it holds two large groups of Eritreans protesting unjust laws: military conscription escapees/evaders and members of banned churches." [50ae]

See also the Annex in the April 2009 HRW 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 Hands off Cain NGO, in its country status report on the death penalty, updated to 29 December 2008, stated that Eritrea is one of the countries that retains the death penalty as a punishment, but also describes Eritrea as a de facto abolitionist country, as no known judicial executions have been carried out since 1993. [39]. In a factfile page updated in December 2005, the University of Westminster, London, Centre for Capital Punishment Studies noted that the crimes that attract the death penalty in Eritrea are murder and acts threatening state security; and that execution is legally performed by either firing squad or hanging. [64]. The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 noted that “the special courts did not hand down capital punishment sentences during the year [2008].” [4j] (section 1e)

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14. POLITICAL AFFILIATION

- 14.01 The Constitution states that every citizen has the right to form organisations for political ends. [2]. However, the US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated “the government did not allow the formation of any political parties other than the PFDJ.” [4j] (section 2b)

FREEDOM OF POLITICAL EXPRESSION

- 14.02 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 noted that “no information was available on the 40 women and elders who were arrested in 2006 when they gathered at the presidential palace in Asmara to ask for information about their husbands and family members, who had been detained in retribution for their children fleeing the country to evade national service; security forces arrested the women and elders for not having a permit to assemble.” [4j] (section 2b). The Government does, however, organise meetings of the regional assemblies with residents of an area, known as *mimihidar*. These meetings, according to an Awate article of 19 March 2008, are mandatory in attendance, and are stilted, stage-managed affairs, and not a forum to ask questions without repercussions. [50h] (Awate, 19 March 2008)

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

- 14.03 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated “the law and unimplemented constitution provide for freedom of association; however, in practice the government did not respect these rights.” [4j] (section 2b)

OPPOSITION GROUPS AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

- 14.04 Since late 2004, the opposition has operated in exile. In 2005, an umbrella group, the Eritrean National Alliance (ENA) emerged. The ENA were reported by Awate in February 2005 as having been instrumental in setting up the conference of opposition groups in Khartoum, with Hiruy T Bairu confident of a solid agreement as the result. [50k]
- 14.05 Individual opposition groups have continued to operate in exile. For instance, the Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP) reported in June 2006 that it was to hold its second regular congress in Milan, Italy, in July 2006. (No report of the conference could be found on the EDP website to date). [72a]. On 23 November 2005, the Eritrean opposition website Meskerem.com reported that the Eritrean government was using the medium of Sudanese opposition groups to make contact with Eritrean opposition groups in exile in Sudan. However, the Eritrean opposition groups found the government’s conditions over “conduct of talks” unacceptable. [71]

See [Opposition in Exile; Political Opposition](#)

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15. FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND MEDIA

- 15.01 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 summarised the situation regarding freedom of speech and media in Eritrea thus:

“The law and unimplemented constitution provide for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the government severely restricted these rights in practice. Citizens did not have the right to criticize their government in public or in private, and some who did so were arrested or detained. The private press remained banned, and most independent journalists remained in detention or had fled the country, which effectively prevented any public and media criticism of the government. The government intimidated the remaining journalists into self-censorship.

“The government controlled all media, which included three newspapers, three radio stations, and two television stations. The law does not allow private ownership of broadcast or other media. The government banned the import of foreign publications; however, individuals were permitted to purchase satellite dishes and subscribe to international media. The government had to approve publications distributed by religious or international organizations before their release, and the government continued to restrict the right of religious media to comment on politics or government policies. The press law forbids reprinting of articles from banned publications. The government also required diplomatic missions to submit all press releases for approval before their publication in the government media.” [4j] (section 2a)

- 15.02 The Reporters without Borders 2009 World Report, published in May 2009, added:

“Eritrea, which has been led since independence by the highly authoritarian Issaias Afewerki, figures in last place on [the] Reporters Without Borders’ world press freedom index. The country has been cut off from the outside world since the terrible round-ups of September 2001 and at least four journalists have died in prison, unknown and forgotten, while the situation goes from bad to worse.

“...the public media in Eritrea do nothing but relay the regime’s belligerent and ultra-nationalist discourse...no divergence is tolerated. Like scores of their fellow citizens who flee the country each month, many journalists working in the public media can no longer bear the gagging imposed on them by the government and go into exile. Most leave on foot at risk of being shot dead by border patrols who have received the order to shoot on sight. The very few foreign correspondents in the country have slowly been driven out as a result of harassment or intimidation, or simply through expulsion. Not a single one now lives in Asmara.” [17a]

- 15.03 The BBC country profile for Eritrea, updated on 15 April 2009, lists the state press agencies as: *Hadas Eritrea* (published three days a week); *Eritrea Profile* (English language weekly paper); *Tigirta* (party youth weekly) and *Geled* (youth weekly); *Eri-TV* (state television); *Dimtsi Hafash* - Voice of the Broad Masses of Eritrea (two radio networks, running programmes in 11 languages); *Radio Zara* (FM network); and *Erina* (Eritrean news agency). [8a]

- 15.04 Most sources point to events on 18 September 2001, when Government forces arrested journalists and closed all independent newspapers, as a defining moment of censorship in Eritrea. [30] (CPJ, September 2005); [5d] (AI, September 2002), [17b] (RWB, 2008)
- 15.05 The source Eritrean Media Guide (EMG), dated February 2006 [73], and the BBC Country Profile of April 2009 [8a] list a wide variety of media agencies, from the official state agencies to the unofficial and opposition news agencies operating outside Eritrea. Of particular note are mentions of Dehai.com, a diaspora website that is described by EMG as pro-government [73] and a site that is the subject of an academic article, 'Diaspora, cyberspace and political imagination: the Eritrean diaspora online' (2006) which follows the way the Eritrean state has been supported by, and has made use of, its diaspora links; and how the diaspora has shaped aspects of the nascent state. [77]

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ARRESTS AND DETENTION OF JOURNALISTS

- 15.06 The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) stated in a report of 16 September 2005 that 15 journalists detained in September 2001 were still being held indefinitely, secretly, without charge, and without access to families or lawyers. The same report named the detainees (see Annex C). The same CPJ report adds that three journalists arrested before the 2001 clampdown remain deprived of their liberty, with two said to be doing extended military service. Two journalists arrested in 2002 also remain in secret jails. [30]. RWB reported in February 2008 that there was still no firm news as to what has happened to the journalists; though, again, "Prison guards, who fled abroad in 2006, revealed that at least three of the journalists who were arrested in 2001, died in prison between 2005 and 2006. And on 11 January [2007], Fessehaye Yohannes, known as 'Joshua' one of the most important figures in the country's intellectual life, died from the effects of appalling prison conditions in Eiraeiro in the north-east of the country where the highest profile prisoners are held." [17b]
- 15.07 The jailed journalists are listed in [Annex C](#). They include Fessehaye 'Joshua' Yohannes, whom CPJ honored with an International Press Freedom Award in 2002 [30]; but who was reported by Amnesty International on 15 February 2007, in 'Prominent journalist reported dead in secret prison', as having possibly died in prison. [5p].
- 15.08 The BBC correspondent Peter Martell chronicled the difficulties that led to the rescinding of his work permit in Eritrea in early 2008. [8i]. The RWB 2008 annual report regarding foreign correspondents adds:
- "The very few foreign correspondents based in Asmara are directly accountable to the information minister, Ali Abdu, who has no hesitation in suspending their work permits at the slightest deviation. Those they interview are at risk of immediate imprisonment. Journalists wishing to travel to Eritrea have to wait for months, during which time they have to convince the Eritrean ambassadors in their home countries that the reporting they plan will be favourable to the government. Any who refer in their articles to the lamentable state of civil and political liberties in the country are expelled." [17b]

- 15.09 In December 2008, assena reported that three youths were arrested in Asmara on 26 December [2008] by the security forces for looking at websites run by the diaspora political opposition. After the arrests of the youths, Internet service providers in Asmara were warned by the authorities not to allow the public access to websites run by the diaspora political opposition. The report further stated that the Eritrean government is worried about the information produced by independent sources, and opposition websites abroad regarding current developments in Eritrea, and has taken measures to further suppress freedom of expression. [94a]
- 15.10 In March 2009, Reporters without Borders reported that the:
- “The [Eritrean] authorities on 22 February 2009, ordered a raid on the premises of Radio Bana, a small station in the heart of the capital that puts out educational programmes under the sponsorship of the education ministry. Its entire staff of around 50 journalists were arrested and taken without explanation to the Doboito detention centre on the edge of the city. Some of the staff were released but several of them remain in custody. Among them are Bereket Misghina, aka Wedi Misghina, a famous actor and playwright; journalist and essayist Yirgalem Asfha, former art critic for the newspaper Zemen; teacher Basilius Zemo, aka Wedi Zemo, and a young teacher Senait Habtu, working in the radio's production studio. Unconfirmed reports suggested they had been transferred to the military prison in Adi Abeito, north-west of Asmara on the road to Keren.” [17c]

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16. HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS, ORGANISATIONS AND ACTIVISTS

16.01 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 noted:

“A few domestic rights groups and international humanitarian groups operated throughout the country, but with government interference and restriction. All NGOs, regardless of their scope of work, were required to register with the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare. In 2005 the government issued a law requiring NGOs to reregister under new guidelines to continue operating. The new guidelines require international NGOs to maintain two million dollars in the local bank. Many failed to receive government approval under the registration process and were required to leave the country. In 2006 the government asked five NGOs - Mercy Corps, ACCORD, Samaritans Purse, International Rescue Committee, and Concern - to close operations and depart the country, which they did.” [4j] (section 4)

16.02 Awate summarised the situation of NGOs, including international NGO involvement, as it stood in early December 2007, working closely with the UN Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA). The article stated that “in 2007, 22 GOs (government organizations) and NGOs (non-governmental organizations) were funding 125 projects in Eritrea to the tune of approximately \$75 million USD.” The article further lists the “aid amount and projects by agency” and also “NGO activity by geography” - namely, in which region of the country the project was based. The article claims that “...the Eritrean regime received and spent almost \$69,000,000 during the first 9 months [of] 2007 - while claiming, the entire time, that it receives no funding from anybody.” [50ai]

16.03 The Eritrea section of the ‘Freedom in the World’ 2009 report added:

“The government continues to maintain a hostile attitude toward civil society. Independent NGOs are not allowed, and the legitimate role of human rights defenders is not recognized. In 2005, Eritrea enacted legislation to regulate the operations of all NGOs, requiring them 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 from the country, and the government expelled three remaining development NGOs in 2006.” [36] (p3)

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17. CORRUPTION

17.01 Transparency International's 2008 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of 180 countries, published in September 2008, ranks Eritrea as the 126th most corrupt country, with a CPI score of 2.6. (Somalia, which is number 180 in the 2008 CPI, is the worst country in terms of perceived corruption.) 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 2008 CPI is a composite index that draws on multiple expert opinion surveys that poll perceptions of public sector corruption in 180 countries. The CPI scores range from 10 (low level of corruption) to 0 (high level of corruption). [96]

17.02 Awate reported that corruption had emerged with the decline of the economy in 2007 and its subsequent shortages of basic commodities, stating in a report dated 2 July 2007 that:

“Even officials who work in departments inside Asmara are competing in the market. The trick is to inflate the number of employees and ask for more than the allocated supply. For example, a department that overstates the number of its employees would get four quintals of sugar instead of 1 or 2 quintals. The bosses would then sell the ‘excess’ at the black market. The employees are aware of the fraud but do not report it for fear of being either fired or transferred to remote areas. From this ‘excess’, family members of the military elite can buy commodities at bargain prices – for example, a 50-kilo wheat of flour which sells for 1,000 nakfa is available to them at 500 nakfas.” [50ab]

17.03 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 noted that:

“The World Bank's 2008 governance indicators reflected that corruption was a problem. There were reports of petty corruption within the executive branch, largely based on family connections. There were allegations of corruption among military leaders involving illicit trade and the appropriation of houses. There were reports that individuals requesting exit visas or passports had to pay bribes.” [4j] (section 3)

17.04 The Eritrea section in the ‘Freedom in the World’ 2009 report, published in 2009 added:

“Eritrea long maintained a reputation for a relatively low level of corruption. In recent years, however, graft appears to have increased somewhat. Eritrea was ranked 126 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2008 Corruption Perceptions Index. Citing World Bank information, the Heritage Foundation Index of Economic Freedom reports petty corruption within the executive branch, based largely on family connections.” [36] (p2)

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18. FREEDOM OF RELIGION

OVERVIEW

- 18.01 As regards the religious make-up of the Eritrean population, the US State Department 2008 International Religious Freedom report, published in September 2008, stated that:

“Although reliable statistics are not available, it is estimated that 50 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, 30 percent is Orthodox Christian, and 13 percent is Roman Catholic. Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Protestants, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Buddhists, Hindus, and Baha’is. Approximately 2 percent of the population practice traditional indigenous religions.” [4I] (p1).

- 18.02 The US State Department 2008 International Religious Freedom report added that:

“The Constitution, ratified by the National Assembly in 1997, provides for religious freedom; however, the Government has yet to implement the Constitution. Following a 2002 government decree that religious groups must register, the Government closed all religious facilities not belonging to the country’s four principal religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea, Islam, and the Roman Catholic Church.

“The Government severely restricts freedom of religion for groups that it has not registered and infringes upon the independence of some registered groups. During the reporting period, the Government’s record on religious freedom remained poor. The Government continued to harass, arrest, and detain members of unregistered minority religious groups and sought greater control over the four approved religious groups. The Government failed to register religious groups, and recantations of faith and torture of religious detainees, who were held in harsh conditions.

“Citizens generally were tolerant of one another in the practice of their religion, with the exception of societal attitudes towards Jehovah’s Witnesses and Pentecostal groups. Some individuals viewed failure to perform military service as a sign of disloyalty and encouraged harassment of religious groups, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, whose faith precludes military service. Individuals have been known to report the activities of these religious groups to the Government.” [4I] (p1)

- 18.03 The Eritrean Orthodox Church is not a state church, but is an institution that the Government accords much respect. [4g] (p1) (US State Department IRF report, 2005). There are two other main Christian groups - the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church (Lutheran) - that are accepted by the Government. [1a] (Europa World); Besides the accepted Christian denominations are other Christian groupings (as well as minority non-Christian groupings) that are not accepted, and not tolerated, by the Government. [4h] (p10) (US State Department Human Rights report for 2007); [4I] (p1) (US State Department IRF report, 2008)

REGISTRATION SCHEME

- 18.04 The US State Department 2008 International Religious Freedom report stated that:

“Following the 2002 government decree that all religious groups must register or cease all religious activities, religious facilities not belonging to the four officially recognized religious groups were forced to close. In the past, [the] authorities in the Office of Religious Affairs told religious groups that home prayer meetings would be permitted, although the Government did not fully respect this guidance. Treatment of unregistered groups often varied by locale. Reports indicated that the Government continued to disrupt home-based worship, arresting individuals hosting home prayer meetings. Some local authorities allowed unregistered groups to worship in homes or rented spaces, whereas others did not allow them to meet at all. Religious groups were informed that a standing law would be used to prevent unregistered religious groups from holding political or other gatherings in private homes of more than three to five persons. In practice, [the] authorities enforced this law. [4I] (section 2)

- 18.05 The Proclamation on Religious Organisations no. 73/1995 is the primary piece of legislation for the registration. [5I] (p4) (AI, December 2005). The information required under registration is listed in an annex to a Release Eritrea posting, dated 25 June 2005. [31c] (p5-7). A registration exercise was originally planned in 1995, with the four main faith groups (Orthodox, Lutheran, Catholic and Muslim) registered quickly, but other groups' registration postponed until May 2002. [5I] (p8) (AI, December 2005). The Government had, in the meantime, in 1997, approved a constitution which provides the freedom to practice any religion, though in practice, this provision has yet to be implemented. [4g] (p2) (US State Department IRF report for 2005). In May 2002, all unregistered religious groups were required to cease operation until they had been granted registration by the Government. [4g] (p2) (US State Department IRF report for 2005); [5I] (p8) (AI, December 2005). This edict affected 12 unregistered Christian churches at the time. The four recognised religious groups were not required to register. [4g] (p2) (US State Department IRF report for 2005)

- 18.06 The US State Department 2008 International Religious Freedom report stated:

“Several other religious groups have complied partially with the registration requirements, and some have chosen not to submit any documentation. Registration requirements include a description of the history of the religious group in the country, an explanation of the ‘uniqueness’ or benefit that the group offers compared with other religious groups already present, names and personal information of religious leaders, detailed information on assets and property owned by the group, and sources of funding from abroad. A government committee reviews the applications, which in theory are to be approved only if they conform to local culture. The Government approved no registrations during the period covered by this report, despite repeated inquiries.” [4I] (p2)

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ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

- 18.07 The members of unregistered churches have been subject to arrest periodically by the authorities as a consequence of not being registered. Details of arrests are documented in the AI December 2005 report [51]; in the HRWF for 2003 reports [61]; and in the Release Eritrea report of 25 June 2005. [31e]. The AI report of December 2005 highlights:
- “...44 incidents of religious persecution which have been documented over the past three years [2003 to 2005] and are mainly the consequence of the government’s ban in 2002 on the minority religious groups...the sources for information for these arrests, numbering over 1,750 men, women and children altogether during this period, include international religious organizations monitoring the arrests and Eritrean diaspora faith groups, as well as Amnesty International’s own sources. Undoubtedly there have been many more cases not reported.” [51] (p9-10)
- 18.08 The US State Department 2008 International Religious Freedom report noted that “While many were ostensibly jailed for evasion of military conscription, significant numbers were being held solely for their religious beliefs, and some were held in harsh conditions, such as in shipping containers or underground, that included extreme temperature fluctuations. There were reports of torture and death while in official custody. Many detainees were required to recant their religious beliefs as a precondition of release.” [41] (p5)
- 18.09 Reports of arrests have included an AI Urgent Action regarding “40 pastors, elders, and leading laymen from five of Eritrea’s banned Protestant churches” in late December 2005. [87a] (Voices of the Martyrs [VOM]); 75 Evangelicals detained on 17 February 2006; [5i] (Amnesty International). On 23 May 2006, 54 college students were arrested. [31d] (Release-Eritrea). On 25 August 2006, Release-Eritrea filed a report stating that one in ten Eritreans are now in detention, and that arrests had continued throughout August 2006 adding “at least 29 Eritrean Christians” to the total detained. [31g]. A VOM article of 1 November 2006 adds 150 arrested in late October 2006, totalling 2,087 Eritreans arrested for their religious beliefs, mainly Christians but also some Muslims. [87e]. The same source adds a report dated 25 January 2007 that notes a further 68 Christians arrested in early January 2007. [87f]. VOM also reported on 26 February 2007 the death of a Christian in the Adi-Nefase military confinement facility, located just outside Assab: the third Christian to die in Government detention since October 2006, (also reported by VOM on 23 October 2006 [87d]). A Christian NGO reported a new development in June 2007, of children of Christians being detained as well as their parents in arrests in Decemhare on 27 May 2007. [93]
- 18.10 The US State Department 2008 International Religious Freedom Report stated that “the Government did not excuse individuals who objected to military conscription for religious reasons or reasons of conscience, nor did it provide for alternative national service.” [41] (p2).

18.11 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 added the following:

“During the year [2008] there continued to be reports that security forces used extreme physical abuse such as bondage, heat exposure, and beatings to punish those detained for their religious beliefs. Numerous detainees were reportedly required to sign statements repudiating their faith or agreeing not to practice it as a condition for release. There also continued to be reports that relatives were asked to sign for detainees who refused to sign such documents.” [4j] (section 2c)

18.12 The campaigning organisation Release Eritrea! noted the following further incidents in 2007:

- The disruption by the Eritrean authorities of a wedding held on 4 February 2007 at a private house, with the detention of the bride, groom and thirty guests. [31j]
- The arrest of Pastor Habtom Tesfa-Michael of Muluwængel Church. [31j]
See Muluwængel Church
- The authorities raided the Mehret Yesus Church, a Presbyterian Church, on 29 April 2007. The church was not a banned church, but belonged to the registered Evangelical churches denomination. [31k]. The pastor, Zecharias Abraham, and 80 members of his congregation were arrested; the pastor was later released in May 2007. [31i]
See Evangelical Protestant /Orthodox Presbyterian Church
- A dawn raid on 27 May 2007 of Kale Hiwœt church members in Dekemhare, which led to the arrest of “several residents, including young children”. [31i]
See Kale Hiwœt (Word of Life)
- The authorities raided the Mehret Yesus Church, a Presbyterian Church, on 29 April 2007. The church was not a banned church, but belonged to the registered Evangelical churches denomination. [31k]
- Accounts in September 2007 from newly-arrived refugees to the Shimelba camp in Ethiopia talk of an increasing pressure upon evangelical Christians. [31i]
- In October 2007, Pastor Ukbamichael Teklehaymanot of the Kale Hiwœt Church was detained for the third time in five years. [31m]
See Kale Hiwœt (Word of Life)

- 18.13 The Human Rights Watch 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report added:

“Human Rights Watch interviewed 13 Evangelical Christian refugees, all of whom had been imprisoned - and some tortured - for their faith. Evangelical Christians wishing to practice their faith must do so clandestinely. Even then they are not safe from government abuse. Several Christians described holding prayer meetings in private houses during 2006 and 2007 in Asmara, Tesseney, and Senafe. Police or military, possibly acting on information given by informers, disrupted the meetings and arrested those present. One elderly woman who has been a Pentecostal Christian for over 40 years said that because of the threat of informers she has taken to praying with different people, in different places, and different times. [29e] (p60)

“...according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) by June 2007 over 2,000 Christians were in detention in Eritrea. In late 2008, CSW reported house to house searches and a wave of arrests in numerous Eritrean towns, including Asmara. According to the organization 100 people were arrested in the period leading up to December 12, 2008, and detained in military facilities, some of them dying in custody. Compass Direct, a Christian rights organization, estimated that by late 2008 nearly 3,000 Christians were in detention. Compass Direct reported that three Christians had died in custody in the latter part of 2008, and that in June eight others were transferred to medical facilities because they had been tortured in custody.” [29e] (p61)

- 18.14 The US State Department 2008 International Religious Freedom report noted the following incidents that occurred in 2008:

- In February 2008 there were reports of police arresting 38 members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Ten of these were released soon after; however, the remaining 28 were reported [to be] in custody at the end of the reporting period.
- In February 2008 [the] authorities released 35 Christians in Massawa after imprisoning them for 6 weeks.
- In February 2008 officials released 10 Christians on bail. They had been imprisoned for 5 years.
- As of February 2008 the pastor of Kale Hiwot Church remained in prison after his arrest in October 2007; it was his third arrest in 5 years.
- In May 2008 police reportedly arrested 34 evangelical Christian in Keren during a house raid. This number included 10 women, one of whom was reportedly pregnant. Of the 10 women, all but 4 were released soon after. All remaining prisoners were reportedly transferred to the Adi Abeto military prison.
- In May 2008 the Government arrested 25 Protestant Christians in Asmara who were later incarcerated at the military camp in Wi’a. [41] (p3)

18.15 A Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) news report dated 5 January 2009 stated that:

“Since late November [2008], about 100 Christians, men, women and children, have been arrested by Eritrean authorities, VOM Canada reported. The wave of house arrests began in northern Eritrean cities and moved to southern regions before reaching the capital, Asmara, on Dec. 12 [2008]. Some of the detained Christians were reportedly transferred to a military facility and were severely mistreated. Local sources indicate that an unspecified number may have died due to untreated injuries sustained in detention.

“The Eritrean government persecutes Christians, often placing believers in metal containers that are extremely hot during the day and cold during the night. Nearly 1,800 Eritrean Christians are believed to be under arrest because of their religious beliefs. They are being held in police stations, military camps and prisons in 12 known locations across Eritrea. It is believed more than 28 clergymen are being held.

“Jailed Christians are routinely subjected to physical beatings and severe psychological pressure to deny their religious beliefs. Police and military authorities continue to demand the prisoners return to one of the three ‘official’ Christian denominations recognized by the government. But even the legally recognized denominations - the nation’s historic Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran churches - have come under government disfavor in recent years, incurring threats and even imprisonment.” [87c]

18.16 Compass Direct News reported in July 2009:

“Another Christian imprisoned for his faith in Eritrea has died from authorities denying him medical treatment, according to a Christian support organization.

“Sources told Netherlands-based Open Doors that Yemane Kahasay Andom, 43, died Thursday (July 23) at Mitire Military Confinement Center.

“A member of the Kale-Hiwot church in Mendefera, Andom was said to be secretly buried in the camp.

“Weakened by continuous torture, Andom was suffering from a severe case of malaria, Open Doors reported in a statement today.

“ ‘He was allegedly further weakened by continuous physical torture and solitary confinement in an underground cell the two weeks prior to his death for his refusal to sign a recantation form,’ the organization said. ‘It is not clear what the contents of the recantation form were, but most Christians interpret the signing of such a form as the denouncement of their faith in Christ.’

“Andom is the third known Christian to die this year at the Mitire camp, located in northeastern Eritrea.” [47b]

See [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#)

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RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Muslims

- 18.17 The US State Department 2006 International Religious Freedom report states that “Islam and Orthodox Christianity are practiced widely and are for the most part tolerated, with persons allowed to worship freely.” [4e] (p2). Awate published an article on 21 May 2007 that took issue with an American publication that attempted to portray the Eritrean Government as a Muslim government oppressing Christian citizens, in the wake of allegations of the Eritrean Government assisting the union of Islamic Courts in Somalia in 2006. [50w]. The US State Department 2008 International Religious Freedom Report stated that “there were reports that nearly 180 Muslims who opposed the Mufti appointed by the Government more than 15 years ago continued to be detained as they refused to honor his presence. This situation has been unchanged for 15 years.” [4l] (p5)
- 18.18 The Jubilee Campaign’s overview of the lack of freedom of religion in Eritrea notes that there is still resentment within the Muslim community about arrests of protestors objecting to the Government’s appointment of the new chief mufti in 2006. [47a] (p2)

The Orthodox Church of Eritrea

- 18.19 The BBC reported on 7 December 2005 that the campaign group Christian Solidarity Worldwide had stated that ‘permitted’ churches were facing repression from the Eritrean Government. [8k]. The statement crystallises the finding of various reports from 2004 and 2005 which have noted that Medhane Alem, a group inside the Orthodox church has been targeted by the Government. The USSD report for 2005 summarised:
- “In February [2005] the government shut down and arrested the organizers of a Sunday school organized by an Orthodox church group known as Medhane Alem, a group whose religious services the government did not approve. At year’s end [2005] the three organizers remained in jail. The three ministers led the Medhane Alem group and who were arrested in October 2004 remained imprisoned without charge at year’s end [2005][sic – repetition].” [4g] (p6)
- 18.20 The Release Eritrea report, dated 25 June 2005, added more detail about Medhane Alem:
- “In December 2004 reports began to circulate indicating that three Orthodox priests had been detained during the third week of November 2004. Rev. Dr Futsum Gebrenegus, Eritrea’s only psychiatrist, Rev. Dr Tekleab Menghisteab, a highly respected physician, and Rev. Gebremedhin Gebregiorgis, an expert theologian, are all reported to have been involved in the renewal movement within the Orthodox Church, which was recently criticized by President Afwerki during his Independence Day speech on May 24 2005. According to local sources, the Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church objected to these arrests and accused the government of ‘interfering’ in church affairs. Following this intervention, for the first time ever the traditional Christmas message by the Patriarch was not aired on national media.” [31e]

18.21 The US State Department 2008 International Religious Freedom report added:

“The Government continued to maintain a high degree of control over the operations of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, highlighting concerns regarding the independence and freedom of religious practice permitted within the Church by the Government. In August 2005, the Government appointed a lay administrator to manage and oversee church operations, in contravention to the Orthodox Church Constitution. Shortly after this appointment, the Holy Synod voted to remove church Patriarch Abune Antonios on putative charges that he had committed heresy and was no longer following church doctrine. A new patriarch, Abune Dioscoros, was selected by the synod. The deposed patriarch continued to be able to serve as a priest; however, he was forbidden to conduct church services. In January 2006, the deposed patriarch objected to his removal through a letter sent, and made public, to the Holy Synod. In the letter he denied the charges against him and excommunicated several synod members, as well as the lay administrator, stating that their actions, and those of the Government, violated the Constitution and bylaws of the Eritrean Orthodox Church.” [41] (p5)

18.22 According to a Christian Solidarity Worldwide report, a demonstration took place outside the Eritrean Embassy in London in May 2009. The CSW report stated that “over 80 supporters of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), Release Eritrea (RE), Church in Chains (Ireland), Open Doors and Release International took part in the demonstration, which culminated in the presentation of a letter calling for the release of all prisoners held without charge or trial, including up to 3000 Christians.” The report further stated that “as the protest took place, news emerged from Eritrea that Abune Antonios, the ordained patriarch of the Orthodox Church, had been briefly released from stringent house arrest for medical treatment.” Also concerning Antonios, the report stated that he had been deposed in 2006 from his position within the Orthodox Church and has been detained in a secret location since then. [67a]

18.23 An Awate report, dated 17 September 2008, stated:

“The Eritrean embassy in Kenya is hunting an Eritrean Orthodox Church priest in Nairobi with the help of some Kenyan officers.

“The priest is among the clergy that opposes the regime’s involvement in the church’s affairs; the embassy’s aim is to deport the priest to Eritrea.

“...the regime has full control over religious institutions inside Eritrea but its attempts to control the spiritual affairs of Eritreans in other parts of the world has proven to be difficult.

“In many cities in Europe and North America, followers of the Orthodox Church are defending their communities from the transgressions of the government and denying its embassies control of their churches.” [50o]

The Roman Catholic Church

- 18.24 On 20 June 2006, the AllAfrica.com website carried a report, “Church fights military service for priests, seminarians”, which noted that the Roman Catholic Church was in dispute with the Eritrean Government about the Government’s insistence that priests under the age of 40 should do military service. [42a]
- 18.25 Amnesty International reported in an article entitled “Pastor and churchgoers held in detention at risk of torture”, dated 8 September 2007, that:
- “The Roman Catholic Church in Eritrea is currently appealing against an order to hand over all its social welfare organisations – schools, medical clinics, orphanages and women’s training centres – to the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour. It has also made repeated requests for exemption for priests from military service, which is compulsory and indefinite.” [5m]

Evangelical Protestant/Orthodox Presbyterian Church

- 18.26 An entry on the Lutheran World Federation list of member churches gives a PO Box in Asmara and lists Rev. Ashfaha Mehari Hagos as president of the Eritrean Lutheran Church. (The directory was accessed on 14 July 2008). [34]

Jehovah’s Witnesses

- 18.27 The US State Department 2008 International Religious Freedom report explained that:
- “Although members of several religious groups, including Muslims, reportedly were imprisoned in past years for failure to participate in national military service, the Government singled out Jehovah’s Witnesses for harsher treatment than that received by followers of other faiths for similar actions. Jehovah’s Witnesses who did not participate in national military service were subject to dismissal from the civil service, revocation of their business licenses, eviction from government-owned housing, and denial of passports, identity cards, and exit visas. They were also prohibited from having their marriages legalized by the civil authorities.
- “In early 2008 [the] authorities fired a teacher of the Jehovah’s Witness faith for refusing to perform military service.
- “Jehovah’s Witnesses were jailed in harsh conditions for lengthy periods; at least three individuals were detained for more than 12 years, reportedly for evading compulsory military service. However, the maximum legal penalty for refusing to perform national service is 2 years. In the past, Ministry of Justice officials have denied that any Jehovah’s Witnesses were in detention without charge, although they acknowledged that some of them, and a number of Muslims, were jailed for evading national service.
- “According to credible sources, 25 Jehovah’s Witnesses remained in detention without charge or trial during the reporting period. Authorities detained 13 at Sawa, 8 for allegedly failing to perform national military service. Authorities detained those above the cut-off age for national service eligibility (54 for men and 47 for women) for attending religious meetings, preaching, or visiting families of escapees.” [4I] (p5)

- 18.28 A Jehovah's Witnesses Office of Public Information news release, dated 18 August 2008, reported on police arrests of Jehovah's Witnesses that had taken place in July and August 2008 (after the period covered by the US State Department 2008 International Religious Freedom report). The news release stated that:

"In what is the most open attempt in recent history to shut down a minority religion in Eritrea, police have systematically arrested 15 of Jehovah's Witnesses during July [2008] and August [2008]. Some of them are presently confirmed to be imprisoned, but the whereabouts of others have not been disclosed.

"On Tuesday, July 8, 2008, authorities began conducting raids on the local residences of Jehovah's Witnesses. Long-time members of the congregations, men in their 50's, 60's and even 70's (sic), were subsequently rounded up in their homes or places of work. In most cases these are the breadwinners for their families." [63]

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'EVANGELICAL' CHURCHES

General information

- 18.29 The term 'Pentes' originates in Ethiopia, and is held to be a pejorative term originating from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's distrust of Pentecostal churches and their practices (African Christianity), and in African Christianity's account, "a testimony to the influence of the Pentecostal movement on Ethiopian Protestantism." [82] (p2)
- 18.30 There is information on the practices of Pentes groups in Ethiopia on the webpage of Jörg Haustein, a theologian specialising in the Pentecostal churches, based at the University of Heidelberg, at <http://www.glopent.net/Members/jhaustein/ethiopia/pentecostal-and-charismatic-movements> [83]. The African Christianity website continues that in Ethiopia:

"The Mulu Wengel (Full Gospel) church grew out of the Heavenly Sunshine Bible study, begun by a group of high school students learning English and a Mennonite doctor, though it was also decisively influenced by the teachings of the Finnish Pentecostal Mission, and has never had formal connections with any western mission. Meserete Kristos [another church] followed Mulu Wengel's lead in cultivating the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit... both Meserete Kristos and Mulu Wengel churches practice faith healing, exorcism of demons, and glossolalia." [82] (p2)

- 18.31 There is no information that these practices are practised in the churches of the same names in Eritrea, though Abbebe Kileyesus's article below claims there are similarities. Information from the AI December 2005 report shows similar societal prejudices against evangelical churches:
- “Since then [May 2002], there has been a rapid growth of evangelical churches in Eritrea. This has often been a source of tension between them and the three main Christian churches, which were losing members to them. They had different doctrines, forms of worship and weddings, and ‘fellowship’ for prayer and study. They often proselytized (sought converts) or expressed their faith in new, ‘charismatic’ ways in public places, which attracted some disapproval from members of the main religious groups – Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran and Islam.” [51] (p8)
- 18.32 An article by Abbebe Kileyesus, entitled ‘Cosmologies in collision: Pentecostal conversion and Christian cults in Asmara’, that was published in the April 2006 edition of African Studies Review, examined Eritrean Pentecostalism as a religious phenomenon. [89]. Kileyesus notes that the Asmara Pentecostal community displays similar traits to the Ethiopian churches, stating:
- “Although the nature of Asmara Pentecostal public space is increasingly defined by Bible reading and group networking on a mass scale, Pentecostal evangelism in Asmara is also navigated increasingly through audio and videotapes as well as printed tracts...the media, both print and electronic, and usually in the Tigrinya language, play a central role in this new wave of Pentecostal proselytization or evangelization, in the consolidation of the congregation, and in the creation of a distinct group of born-again who are different from all others.” [89] (p81)
- 18.33 Kileyesus argues in the article that “aims to contribute to a better understanding of the popularity of Pentecostalism and the formation of religious identity in an Eritrean city”, that Asmara has seen the growth of Pentecostal movements as being in competition with traditional Christian groups in Eritrea, particularly the Eritrean Orthodox Church, against a background of “rapid socioeconomic change”. [89] (p75). Pentecostal Christians are characterised as young, ambitious urbanites who seek prosperity over adherence to the traditional controls of the Orthodox Church. Difficulties with secular authorities are restricted in the article to Pentecostal opposition to the Ethiopian Derg rule prior to Eritrea’s independence in 1993. The date of the actual research is unclear from the article, possibly reflecting practice prior to September 2001. [89] (p91, footnotes 1, 3; p92, footnote 12)

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Menfesawyan “spirituals”

- 18.34 One article, posted on the Mission Network News website, talks of evangelical Christians targeted by the Eritrean authorities as ‘*menfesawyan*’ which translates into English as ‘spirituals’ and equates to practitioners identified as charismatic Christians. The term *menfesawyan* more accurately describes targeted Christians than *Pentes*, encompassing revival movements that span all Christian denominations, including accepted, registered, unregistered and banned groups. [75]
- 18.35 With regards to the number of unregistered Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Eritrea, Human Rights Without Frontiers stated in a 26 November 2003 report that there were 12 independent churches so regarded by the Government in 2002 [61] (p2); by 2005, “at least 36 evangelical and Pentecostal churches” was the AI December 2005 estimate. [51] (p1). Kileyesus, in “Cosmologies in collision”, April 2006, estimates that there are six main different ‘branches’ operating in Asmara - Mulu Wangel [Mulu Wengel], Kale Hiwat, Meserete Kristos, Rhema, Charisma, and Hallelujah - and that “Today there are around twelve thousand active participants, another two or three thousand Sunday service worshippers, and some two thousand *Otābā* (Orthodox *Tāwahdo Bētākərəstiyan*) church members who take part in Pentecostal services occasionally.” [89] (p78)
- 18.36 Release Eritrea noted in a 17 December 2004 posting that:
- “Some of these churches [all evangelical and Pentecostal required by the Government to re-register their churches in May 2002] are historically linked with the worldwide Protestant denominations, such as the Presbyterians, Pentecostals, Baptists, Mennonites, Methodists. Others are indigenous churches, which are not linked to international Protestant denominations, including the Rhema church, the Hallelujah church, the New Covenant church, the Philadelphia church, etc.” [31b]
- 18.37 The USIRF report for 2007 states “At the end of the period covered by this report, 28 leaders and pastors of the unregistered Pentecostal churches had been detained for more than 3 years without due process.” [41] (p4). BBC News has reported that “During the past five years, a brutal campaign has been waged in Eritrea against Christian minorities, focusing mainly on the evangelical and Pentecostal movements. Weddings, baptisms, church services and prayer meetings have been raided by security forces. Guests or congregation members have [been] rounded up and detained en masse.” [8u]

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Known groups

- 18.38 **Church of the Living God**
Members have been named in arrest reports: Semere Zaid, an agriculture lecturer at the University of Asmara (AI December 2005 report) [51] (p12); and 'Pastor Simon' – "Originally from one of the Medhane Alem revival groups within the [Eritrean] Orthodox Church, Pastor Simon is a minister in the Church of the Living God" (Voice of the Martyrs) [87a]. Pastor Simon was arrested on 26 December 2005, but later reported as having escaped from detention and was in hiding, as of 6 January 2006 (Voice of the Martyrs). [87a]
- 18.39 **Dubre Bethel Church**
No information other than the church was located in Asmara in September 2003, when members were arrested, and then released unharmed after several days' detention. (AI report, December 2005) [51] (p10)
- 18.40 **Faith of Christ Church**
Arrest reports noted that members of the Faith of Christ Church were arrested in Adi-Kehey in December 2003 (AI report, December 2005). [51] (p10)
- 18.41 **Hallelujah Church/Hallelujah Pentecostal Church**
Arrests reported include a March 2004 report of Pastor Teweldemedhin and 55 members of the church arrested in Asmara on 12 February 2004. (Amnesty International) [5b]. In September 2005 after the Hallelujah and Philadelphia churches arranged a wedding party in Asmara, 20 people were arrested and detained for one month. (USSD report for 2005) Pastors are included in arrest lists: Pastor Mengist Teweldemedhin. [4f] (section 2c)
- 18.42 **Kale Hiwoet (Word of Life)**
The USIRF report for 2005 refers to the church as "the Kale Hiwot (Baptists)" and notes that it has complied with some, but not all, of the Government's registration requirements. [4g] (p2). The AI report December 2005 adds the church is "a long-established Baptist church affiliated to the SIM, formerly the Sudan Interior Mission." [51] (p5) (also, African Christianity) [82] (p1). On 13 October 2005, the operational headquarters of its development project were closed down by the Government (Release-Eritrea). [31f]. Release-Eritrea reported on 25 August 2006 that Kale Hiwot had had its NGO status revoked by the Government, and all charitable ventures sequestered by the state. [31g] (p2-4)
- Members named - In January 2005, Pastor Ogbamichael Haimanot of the Kale Hiwoet church was detained in Asmara along with 115 evangelical church members. [51] (p12) (AI December 2005 report). Twenty (other) members' whereabouts are still unknown at the end of 2005 after their arrest in March 2004. [4f] (section 2c) (USSD report for 2005). Amnesty International reported the release of ten members over October and November 2005 in an update dated 29 November 2005. [5g]
- Pastors mentioned in arrest reports – Pastor Isaac Mehari; Pastor Ogbamichael Haimanot (released January 2005 after becoming mentally ill); Pastor Issa Mekonnen (Release Eritrea) [31e]. Pastor Simon Tsegay and Mr Gebremichael Yohanness were arrested in March 2006 and "are believed to be in the crime investigation prison in the centre of Asmara." (Release-Eritrea, 25 August 2006) [31g] (p2)

- 18.43 **“Mensfesawyan”**
This may be a misappellation of a spiritual movement rather than the name of an individual church or denomination: the only known mention of this ‘church’ is that it was located in Barentu town in January 2005, and that some of its members were arrested at a wedding on 9 January 2005, along with Mulu Wongel (Full Gospel) church members. [51] (p12) (AI December 2005 report); [50] (Awate, 17 January 2005); [86] (Indian Ocean Newsletter).
- 18.44 **Meserete Kristos** (Christ is the Foundation)
The USIRF report for 2006 refers to the church as “the Meserete Kristos (Mennonite) church” and notes that it has complied with some, but not all, of the Government’s registration requirements. [4i] (p2). The AI report of December 2005 adds “affiliated to the worldwide Mennonite Church, established for several decades.” [51] (p5). A key arrest report was reported by Amnesty International in March 2006, of 200 guests being detained at a Meserete Kristos wedding ceremony on 28 May 2005; most were held for one month’s detention, but as many as 70 were detained for longer in Serwa army camp. [5j] (p3)
- 18.45 **Mulu Wengel/Mulu Wongel/Muluwængel** (Full Gospel)
The main church building complex in Gaza Banda district, Asmara was seized by the Government on 15 October 2003 (HRWF, 3 November 2003). [61]. African Christianity’s account of the church’s Ethiopian roots, however, identifies it as a breakaway Mennonite church that has “insisted on maintaining its independence from western ties.” [82] (p1)
- Mr. Kidane Gebremeskel; Pastor Abraham Belay; Pastor Fanuel Mihreteab; Pastor Hagos Abraha; Rev. Haile Naizghe; Rev Dr. Kufu Gebremeskel; Pastor Kidane Weldou; Pastor Tewelde Gebreab are all listed as arrested in June 2005 (Release Eritrea). [31e]. Also, Pastor Hagos Toomey. [51] (p12) (AI report, December 2005). Further arrests were made in December 2005 (Voice of the Martyrs), including Pastor Jorjo Gebreab. [87a]
- 18.46 **New Covenant Church**
Pastor Yohannes Tesfamichael has been listed as having been arrested in June 2005 (Release Eritrea). [31e]
- 18.47 **Philadelphia Church**
Philadelphia church members were among those arrested at the September 2005 wedding party incident in Asmara, when 20 people were arrested and detained for one month. [4f] (section 2c) (USSD Human Rights report for 2005)

18.48 Rema/Rhema

Pastors of the church, from lists of arrests, include Pastor Habteab Ogbamichael; Pastor Tesfasion Hagos. [8e]. The case of Helen Berhane was widely reported in 2005 and 2006 (Amnesty International, Release-Eritrea, USSD report for 2005). A gospel singer from the Rema Church, Helen Behane was arrested on 13 May 2004. [5i] (p11) (AI December 2005 report). The Release Eritrea posting of 25 June 2005 goes into the detail of Helen Berhane's detention. [31e] (p3). In November 2006, there were reports of Helen Berhane's removal to a hospital in Asmara in October 2006, and then of her full release from prison. [31h] (Release-Eritrea, 2 November 2006). In October 2007, the BBC reported that Ms Berhane was granted asylum in Denmark. [8n] The Kileyesus "cosmologies in collision" article, April 2006, noted that the Rhema church, prior to September 2001, was involved in exorcist practices collectively known as "deliverance". It was portrayed by Kileyesus's informants as a "long-term process" that involved "the need to continuously confront the devil by means of public prayer sessions and deliverance meetings." [89] (p82). The Kileyesus article does not mention whether the deliverance rallies are still attempted after the September 2002 arrests and implementations of the curb on banned religious organisations.

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19. ETHNIC GROUPS

- 19.01 The Encyclopedia of the Peoples of the World, published in 1993, identifies “nine ethno-linguistic groups: Rasha’ida, Baria, Kunama, Beja, Tigre, Tigray, Bilin, Saho and Afar.” [56] (p195). The home page of Mebrat Tzehaie, updated with 2005 population figures, adds further detail:

“Eritrea has a mixed Afro-Asiatic population that is divided by religion and language. There are nine ethnic groups in Eritrea, which are:

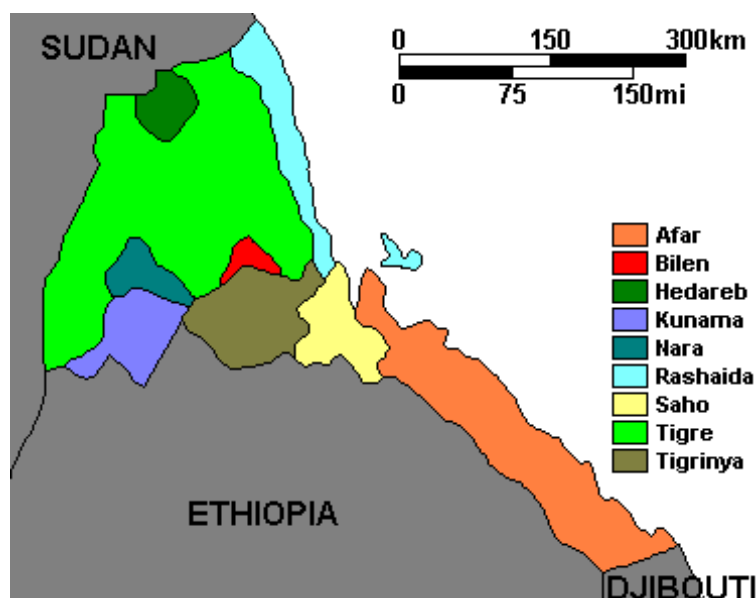
The Kushitic linguistic groups: Afar 4% (Denkalia), Bilin 2% (Keren area), Hedareb 2% (Tessenei), Saho 3% (Foro)

The Nilotic linguistic groups: Kunama 3% and Nara 2% (or Baria) (Western lowlands)

The Semitic linguistic groups: Tigre 35% (Sahel) and Tigrinya 48% (mainly in the highlands)

Groups of recent Arab origin: Rashaida 1% (near Massawa).

Jiberti Muslims regard themselves as an additional (tenth) nationality.” [25b]



Map of ethnic group distribution – from <http://home.planet.nl/~hans.mebrat/eritrea-people.htm> [25b]

- 19.02 The Constitution (in the 1996 draft translation) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, language, colour, sex, religion, disability, political belief or opinion, or social or economic status or any other factors. [2] (Article 14, s.2)

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LANGUAGES

- 19.03 ‘The Languages of the World’ 2005 edition, by Kevin Katzner, stated that “the two main languages...[in Eritrea] are Tigrinya, with about 2 million speakers, and Tigre, with about one million. Others include Afar (150,000) and Beja (125,000).” [60]. Lonely Planet in its guide to Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti, published in November 2000, adds:

“In theory Tigrinya, Arabic and English are all the official languages of Eritrea. In practice Tigrinya is mainly confined to the highlands, Arabic to the coastal regions and along the Sudanese border and English to the educated urban populations (particularly in Asmara)...each of the nine ethnic groups speaks its own language: Afar, Arabic, Bilen, To Bedawi, Kunama, Nara, Saho, Tigre and Tigrinya. Amharic, a legacy of Ethiopian rule is still widely spoken.” [32] (p334)

- 19.04 Amharic, the main language of Ethiopia, is not an accepted language in post-independence Eritrea. The BBC reported on 6 January 2003 that the Eritrean Government had banned Amharic-language songs. The report held that this was problematic for part of the population, stating “During the war [the 1998–2000 border war with Ethiopia] thousands of people of Eritrean origin were deported from Ethiopia and many speak Amharic as their first language.” [8m]. The Ethnologue entry for Amharic states that the number of speakers of Amharic according to the 1998 census, i.e. before the border war displacements, were: “17,372,913 in Ethiopia (1998 census). 14,743,556 monolinguals. Population total all countries: 17,417,913. Ethnic population: 16,007,933 (1998 census).” [59] (Ethnologue, 15th edition, 2005)
- 19.05 In the April 2003 *African Studies Review*, in the article ‘Language, education, and public policy’, Tekle M Woldemikael has studied the Eritrean government’s promotion of one national language as a lingua franca, while also strengthening the use of the main indigenous languages as a medium of education in order to promote ‘unity through cultural diversity’. [74] (p3). The article notes that English, Arabic, and Tigrinya were privileged over other languages for purposes of education, business and administration; and that the policy of ‘mother-tongue education’ has been only partially successful, with the integration of Tigre as the most successful of the projects. [74] (p4, 5). Tekle M Woldemikael concludes that the policy of giving instruction in all Eritrean languages may be abandoned by the government as resources grow scarce. [74] (p12)

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MAIN ETHNIC GROUPS

Afar/Danakils

- 19.06 Information contained in The Lonely Planet Guide to Eritrea (2000 edition) indicates that:

“Afar also known as the Danakils, make up 5% and inhabit the long coastal strip stretching from the Gulf of Zula into Djibouti. Predominantly nomadic pastoralists, the people are Muslim, though elements of ancient ancestor-worship still persist.” [32] (p331)

- 19.07 Information contained in the OrvilleJenkins.com, website, dated November 2008, indicates that:

“The Afar are one of the people about whom little is available. Their inaccessibility makes it difficult to obtain reliable objective information... through their myths of origin, the Afar claim Arab descent. Their language indicates the Afar share a history with neighbouring Cushite peoples.” [85]

- 19.08 The Orville Jenkins website also explains that:

“The Afar are a distinct Eastern Cushite people, whose language and culture are related to the Somali and Oromo. They are very traditional in culture and belief; retaining many ancient Cushite animistic practices... they are a dark brown or black people with Caucasian features, similar to the darker Somali and Oromo. They are likewise distantly related to the ancient Beja group of peoples, who are Southern Cushites, and related in turn to the ancient Egyptian race.” [85]

- 19.09 The Orville Jenkins website continues:

“They are referred to by some sources as the Danakil, from the Arabic name of the Danakil Depression, or Desert, near the Red Sea in Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Amharic name for them is Adal. Adal was the name of an ancient Muslim empire that almost defeated the old Abyssinian Empire at one time. They call themselves Afar, which means in their language ‘The Best’ or ‘First.’” [85]

- 19.10 Information in the Africa Guide, published in 2003, explains that:

“The Afar people in this area are usually found to be malnourished. Their diets consist mainly of bread and milk. There is no natural source of water for the Afar people. Water must be tanked in and as a result it is relatively expensive. Many of the Afar people have anemia [or sic] and malaria, because of their inadequate diets.” [65]

19.11 The Africa Guide continued:

“The Afar nomads have a very unique culture. Their daily life consists of tending to livestock including goats, camels, and a few cattle located in this region. The Afar people are very dependent on the livestock for the economy. Religion is also a part of the Afar way of life. The majority studies the Muslim religion. There is a small percentage that practices Orthodoxy.” [65]

Baria/Nara

19.12 The Lonely Planet Guide to Eritrea stated that “The Nara, also known as the Baria, tribes make up 1.5% of the population and inhabit the Barka Valley near the Sudanese border.” [32] (p333). The Encyclopedia of the Peoples of the World adds “they speak Nara, a Nilotic language. The Baria are Sunni Muslims. They are sedentary agriculturalists. The academic ethnic label ‘Baria’ (Bareya) has in Amharic the literal meaning of ‘slave’, denoting the status of the Baria (and the adjacent Kunamas) in the eyes of their dominant neighbours.” [56] (p97)

Hedareb/Beja/Beni Amber/Beni Amer

19.13 The Lonely Planet Guide to Eritrea stated that:

“The Hedareb, along with their ‘brother’ tribes the Beni Amer and Beja, make up 2.5% of the population, and inhabit the north-western valleys of Eritrea, straddling the border with Sudan...most Hedareb are nomadic and travel great distances in search of pasture. The people are Cushitic in origin (probably directly descended from the ancient Beja tribe) and speak mainly Tigre and an ancient Beja language. The Beni Amer are a strongly patriarchal, socially stratified, almost feudal people. Their skills as camel drivers and in raising camels are legendary. Many of the men scarify their cheeks with three short, vertical strokes – the Italians called them the ‘111 tribe’.” [32] (p331-32)

Bilen/Bogós

19.14 Lonely Planet stated that “the Bilen inhabit the environs of Keren and make up 2.1% of the population. Cushitic in origin, the Bilen are either sedentary Christian farmers or Muslim cattle rearers.” [32] (p332). The World Directory of Minorities adds “the mostly agricultural people comprise two main tribes of about 15,000 each: Bet Teqwe and the Gebre Terqe.” [6]. The Encyclopedia of the Peoples of the World notes “they speak Bilin and Tigre, members of the central Cushitic language group. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, they were Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, but since then have shifted to Sunni Islam with a smaller number becoming Roman Catholics.” [56] (p112)

19.15 Lonely Planet stated that:

“Bilen traditional society is organised into kinship groups. The women are known for their brightly coloured clothes and their gold, silver or copper nose-rings which indicate their means and social status. Like the Beja language, Bilen is slowly being replaced by Tigre, Tigrinya and Arabic, due to intermarriage, economic interactions and because Arabic is taught in local schools.” [32] (p332)

Kunama

- 19.16 Lonely Planet notes “The Kunama are Nilotic in origin, and are very dark skinned. They are the original inhabitants of the region.” [3] (p332). A UK fact-finding mission report of April 2003 adds that the Kunama are essentially nomads who have been forced to settle, but have retained through isolation and tenacity a cultural identity, which includes features such as matrilinear descent (where daughters inherit from mothers as the mode of inheritance). Women are therefore relatively privileged within Kumara society. [3] (p41)
- 19.17 The UK fact-finding mission reported in April 2003 that:
- “The Kunama has traditionally relied on the Ethiopian Army when larger and more powerful ethnic neighbours attacked them. For historic reasons, although the majority of the Eritrean population strongly supported Eritrean independence, the Kunama still maintained their support for the Ethiopian army, although there was also support for independence and a number of Kunama fought on the side of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). ‘the Kunama people were in fact divided in opinion and had a great respect for the Ethiopians as well as many believed in Eritrea as a separate and independent nation. In the absence of a unifying Kunama political figure all conflicting opinions were heard’, stated Gilkes [a consultant on the Horn of Africa].” [3] (p42)
- 19.18 The UK fact-finding mission report noted that “land disputes between the government and the Kunama, whereby the Kunama are pushed into ever-diminishing tribal lands, as the non-Eritrean population expands to relieve pressure in the more densely populated parts of Eritrea. This is further complicated by a history of conflict between the Kunama and the EPLF/PFDJ (the ruling Eritrean party and its armed force precursor). 1994 Land Proclamation (Law No. 58/1994): This is the principal piece of legislation regulating land ownership, and stipulates that all land is the property of the state.” [3] (p42). Dr Patrick Gilkes, a consultant on the Horn of Africa gave information to the UK fact-finding mission in its report on the 1991–1997 Tigrean migration in Barentu and other Kunama areas, their subsequent flight after the arrival of Ethiopian troops in 2000, and later return. [3] (p44)
- 19.19 The report further noted that Gilkes stated that probably the two best-known Kunama resistance groups are the “Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrean Kunama (DMLEK) and the Eritrean Democratic Resistance Movement-Gash Setit (EDRM).” The Eritrean Democratic Resistance Movement-Gash Setit (EDRM), “which also calls itself ‘Sawrawi Baito’, is led by Ismail Nada and is reportedly close to the current ELF. Some expect them to merge with the ELF at some point. Nada a former ELF fighter is said to think along similar lines to leading ELF-RC members.” The Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrean Kunama (DMLEK) is “led by Kerneolos Osman and is best known for the material it places on pro-opposition websites. The DMLEK is based in Addis Ababa.” [3] (p44)

- 19.20 UNHCR comments that “those Kunama who were detained during 2004 were also released during 2004.” [18b]. Refugees International, in an article dated 18 February 2004, stated that:

“UNHCR has begun discussions with the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea concerning the possible voluntary return of the Kunama to Eritrea. Repatriation would be the ideal, most durable solution for the refugees; however, there are no concrete plans in place at this time. Eritrean officials insist that the refugees would be welcomed back to Eritrea, but refugees are sceptical of this claim. Many of the Kunama refugees fled Eritrea to avoid having their sons conscripted into the army. ‘I came here to save myself and my family,’ one refugee told the UN. ‘Until things change I do not want to return.’ Resettlement in Ethiopia does not appear to be a viable option for the Kunama, and few of the refugees have made efforts to seek relocation in a third country.” [21a] (p2)

- 19.21 A UNHCR report, dated 5 July 2007, stated that:

“The UN refugee agency has begun the resettlement in the United States of some 700 ethnic Kunama refugees from Eritrea, flying out a first group of 29 from Addis Ababa after years of exile in northern Ethiopia.

“...the 700 due for resettlement in the United States were displaced by the 1998-2000 border war between their native Eritrea and Ethiopia. The UNHCR-assisted operation is due to last until September [2007] and the Kunamas will be flown to several US cities, including Atlanta, Orlando, Seattle and Las Vegas.

“The refugees are members of a largely rural ethnic group of about 100,000 people who reside on the disputed Ethiopia-Eritrea border. They crossed into Ethiopia complaining of alleged persecution and harassment by the Eritrean government.

“...today, almost 1,300 Kunama refugees are in Ethiopia, but not all of them want to be resettled in the United States.

“Several hundred withdrew their applications for resettlement, apparently due to their strong sense of kinship and a desire to remain close to their ancestral lands. They hope that one day a lasting political solution will be found and they will be able to return home.” [18a]

- 19.22 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 added that, “there were reports of government and societal discrimination against the Kunama, one of nine ethnic groups, residing primarily in the west.” [4] (section 5)

Rashaida

19.23 The Lonely Planet guide to Eritrea stated:

“The Rashaida are the only true Eritrean nomads. Making up just 0.5% of the population, they roam the northern coasts of Eritrea and Sudan, as well as the southern reaches of the Nubian desert. Like their neighbours the Beja (related to the Hedareb) they live by raising cattle and are Muslim...their language is Arabic...the Rashaida people are known for their great pride; marriage is only permitted within their own clan. The people are expert goat rearers, as well as merchants and traders along the Red Sea coasts.” [32] (p333)

Saho

19.24 Information published in 2007 in the World Directory of Minorities website indicates that “sandwiched between Afar and Tigre are Saho nomads and semi-nomads...Saho speak local languages but have also used Arabic in commercial dealings and have long been exposed to foreign influence in the form of trade with expanding empires.” [6]. The Encyclopedia of the Peoples of the World adds “They are Sunni Muslims, with some Ethiopian Orthodox Christians.” [56] (p509)

19.25 Lonely Planet added that:

“Many Saho children (up to the age of 16) wear little leather pouches around their neck, which are full of herbs and spices to ward off evil spirits...The Saho are organised in patrilineal descent groups. The leaders, elected by the male assembly, are known as ‘rezantos’, and were formerly military chiefs in times of war.” [32] (p331)

Tigrinya

19.26 The Lonely Planet Guide to Eritrea noted regarding the Tigrinya majority:

“The Tigrinya make up 50% of the Eritrean population and inhabit the densely populated central highlands, extending over the provinces of Seraye, Hamasien and Akele Guzay. The people are sedentary farmers and are overwhelmingly Orthodox Christian, with just a small minority of Muslims, who are better known as Jiberti.” [32] (p330)

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Jiberti/Djiberti/Jeberty

- 19.27 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in a letter dated 10 May 1996, stated that the Tigrinya Jiberti are “Muslims scattered throughout the Christian Highlands who practise Islam but also observe some customs of the Christians among whom they live.” The document also concludes that the Jiberti speak the Tigrinya language and some Arabic. [10b]. A Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board Response to Information Requests (RIR) ERI100844.e, dated 7 December 2005, added:

“In 26 November 2005 correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, a professor at the Department of History of the University of Durham, who conducted research on the recent conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, stated that the Eritrea Jiberti community is ‘small’ but ‘complex’. Without clarifying this statement, the professor of history described the relationship between the Jiberti community and the Eritrean government authorities as ‘uneasy’ (26 Nov. 2005).” [68b]

- 19.28 The UNHCR Writenet report, published in October 2006, ‘Eritrea: challenges and crises of a new state’, adds, regarding the Jiberti, “a Muslim Tigrigna-speaking group, which claims unique historical-religious antecedents, has been calling for recognition of the group as an ‘ethnic’ group,...pursuant to this, they have established the Eritrean al-Nhada Party.” [18d] (p18)

Tigre/Tegre

- 19.29 The World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples stated that:

“The Tigre (Tegre) peoples, who represent about one-third of the country’s population, are dominant. Culturally and ethnically they are related to the Beja of Sudan. Claiming Arab origin, their language, Tigre, is Semitic. Mostly Muslim, their primary occupation is cattle herding. Most are nomadic, however, some have settled by rivers such as the Barka and on state cotton plantations...Tigre is used to describe the people who speak Tigre and the language itself. It shared origins with Tigrinya but is now very different. Its use is declining under the impact of Tigrinya in Eritrea.” [6]

- 19.30 The Encyclopedia of the Peoples of the World stated that the Tigre also speak “Bedawiye and Arabic. They are Sunni Muslims or Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. A major shift from the latter to the former religion took place during the first half of the nineteenth century, which loosened Tigre links with the Ethiopians”. The same Encyclopedia noted that “the Tigre include ten major tribal units: Ad Sawra, Ad Sheikh, As Mu’allim, Aflenda, Bet Asgede, Bet Juk, Marya, Mensa, Meshalit and Sabdarat”, and also noted that “historically ‘Tigre’ was used to denote a vassal to a ruling stratum claiming descent from the Beni Amer or Saho.” [56] (p600). Lonely Planet stated that “Tigrean society is traditionally hierarchical, with a small aristocracy known as ‘shemagille’ ruling the masses. When the village leader dies, his power passes to his offspring.” [32] (p330).

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20. LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PERSONS

- 20.01 Asylumlaw.org's 'World Survey' notes regarding Eritrea, "Eritrea Homosexuality: Legal. M (F situation unclear) Age of consent 18. Transgender: No data or legal situation unclear." [15]. The website Behind the Mask, which surveys and monitors the situation of homosexuals in Africa, poses the initial problem regarding information on this issue:
- "Some contradictory indications regarding Eritrea, despite the fact that ILGA [International Lesbian and Gay Association] (source La Semaine Gai) list the status of homosexuality in Eritrea as being legal, two gay men are known to have been granted asylum in 1995 by the US (IGLHRC AP). Eritrea appears to have no sodomy laws." [37]
- 20.02 The International Lesbian and Gay Association 'State-sponsored Homophobia' report, published in May 2009, stated that in legislative terms, Eritrea follows the old Ethiopian law and homosexual acts (both male and female) are illegal. The punishment for homosexual acts is imprisonment. [12]
- 20.03 According to the British Embassy in Asmara, in a letter dated 14 July 2003:
- "Penal Code Proclamation of 1957 No. 158/1957 Book V Title IV Section II which is still in force in Eritrea strictly prohibits 'Sexual Deviations', among which is performing sexual acts with someone of the same sex." Confirmation is given that people who commit "such an act are prosecuted and punished whenever found guilty." [10f]
- 20.04 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated that:
- "Homosexuality is illegal, and homosexuals faced severe societal discrimination. The government openly expressed a severe paranoia against homosexuals, accusing foreign governments of promoting the practice in order to undermine the government. There were no known official discriminatory practices against civilians, although there were uncorroborated reports that known homosexuals in the military were subjected to severe abuse." [4j] (section 5)
- 20.05 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in a letter dated 9 September 2005, stated that:
- "Homosexuality is dealt with severely in Eritrea and that anybody with a known history of this kind would find it very difficult to return and reside in the country. If the individual had previously come to the attention of the authorities in the context of his/her sexuality there could be problems in gaining entry to Eritrea and he/she would certainly be 'ear-marked.'" [10c]
- 20.06 Most of the above information is reiterated in the Canadian IRB's reply to a request, dated 28 February 2007. [68e]

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21. DISABILITY

21.01 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 noted that:

“The law and unimplemented constitution prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, or in the provision of other state services, and there were no reports of discrimination in practice...there are no laws mandating access for persons with disabilities to public thoroughfares or public or private buildings, but many newly constructed buildings provided such access.” [4j] (section 5)

21.02 In comments submitted to the Advisory Panel on Country Information on 8 March 2006, UNHCR stated “the facilities for the disabled are not functioning and there is very limited assistance to disabled, despite the high numbers.” [18e]. AllAfrica.com reported on 31 January 2006 in an article that would indicate that facilities are functioning, though the information is dependent upon government sources:

“Community-based rehabilitation programs for the disable [sic] in the Southern region are bearing fruitful outcome. Reports from the Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare indicated that out of 1,600 disabled nationals, 877 have made significant improvement in their standard of living in 2005 thanks to the rehabilitation program. Likewise, another 321 disabled persons received health services and were provided with job opportunities. Moreover, the Ministry extended over one million Nakfa interest-free loans that would be paid back after 3 years to 96 disabled citizens so as to help them improve their standard of living”. [42c]

21.03 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 likewise noted the government-stated commitment:

“The government dedicated substantial resources to support and train the thousands of men and women with physical disabilities that resulted from the war for independence and the conflict with Ethiopia.” [4j] (section 5)

21.04 The ICRC, in their annual report for 2007, published on 27 May 2008, stated:

“Eritrea’s three physical rehabilitation centres (Asmara, Assab and Keren) lacked the materials to produce enough mobility devices to meet demand. According to government estimates, there were some 58,000 disabled people in the country, many of them war amputees. In an ICRC programme initiated in late August [2007] with the Labour and Human Welfare Ministry, the centres received raw materials, components and physiotherapy equipment, and 12 staff participated in an eight-week prosthetics/orthotics course.” [40a] (p4)

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22. WOMEN

LEGAL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

22.01 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 noted that:

“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.” [4] (section 5)

22.02 The same US State Department report continued:

“Sexual harassment is illegal; however, cultural norms prevented women from reporting these types of incidents, and no one was charged or prosecuted for sexual harassment.” [4] (section 5)

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

22.03 A Canadian IRB reply to a request, published on 28 February 2007, gave details of the work of the National Union of Eritrean Women, described as an Eritrean Government-sanctioned “non-governmental organization as well as a government mechanism concerned with equality”. [68g]

22.04 A report, dated 30 January 2006, that was published in the AllAfrica.com website stated that:

“The Chairperson of the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), Ms. Leul Gebreab, attended the UN meeting in New York on putting an end to gender discrimination...in her briefing, Ms Leul said that the issue of gender equality in Eritrea was practiced as a significant aspect of the Liberation struggle before the adoption of gender equality at global level. She added that Eritrean women have taken [an] active role along with their male counterparts in all domains of life during the 30 year struggle.” [42b]

22.05 According to the Suwera Centre for Human Rights report, “The State of Human Rights in Eritrea 2008”, published in August 2009:

“Women receive low wages than men at a rate of 50-80% and they only constitute 7.4% of the skilled labour force in the country. However the low rate of the [sic] employment among females in the field of teaching, which is considered favourable to them, well demonstrates the big margin between males and females in the employment market. Women constituted only 11% of the teaching staff in the intermediate and secondary school stages in the school year 2002-2003.” [22] (p9)

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Marriage

22.06 The Right to Education.org website contains a profile on Eritrea stating:

“According to article 46 of proclamation No. 1, 1991 of the TCCE, marriage is solely based on the voluntary agreement of both partners. In general, persons have to attain the age of 18 years if they are going to marry. In spite of this, the Code in many articles talks of under-age marriage. But for an under age person to marry, he/she must voluntarily agree and get the permission from his/her parents (article 309/1 of the Transitional Penal Code of Eritrea (TPCE)). ... with regard to the minimum marriageable age, although the draft Civil Code of Eritrea states that the marriageable age is 18, this does not apply if the man and woman have both attained the full age of 16 years and the woman submits to the authority who will celebrate the marriage a declaration made by a doctor stating that the woman is pregnant or has already given birth to a child (article 581/2 of the draft Civil Code).” [48]

22.07 The profile continued:

“In many parts of the country, the male elders of the extended families pursue all marriage alliances - usually along religious, ethnic and linguistic lines. Girls are often betrothed between the ages of 8 and 14 and conclude the marriage between the ages of 13 and 15. Girls often have no choice in their marriage partner. However, in some ethnic groups, such as the Nara, marriage is not acceptable until the woman is 18 and the man 20 years of age.” [48]

22.08 Everyculture.com noted that:

“Customary rules of marriage vary among the ethnic groups. Generally, girls marry at an early age, sometimes as young as fourteen. A large share of the marriages in the rural areas are still arranged by the family groups of concern.” [16]

22.09 The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) has stated in a report published in 2003 entitled ‘Violence against Girls in Eritrea’, that:

“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.” [43]

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Abortion

22.10 According to information [undated] published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division:

“According to the most recent information available, abortion practices in Eritrea are still governed by the abortion law of Ethiopia. Since gaining its independence from Ethiopia in April 1993, Eritrea has sought to progressively adopt a new system of regulations; however, the Penal Code has not yet been revised. The Ethiopian Penal Code of 1957 prohibits abortion except when it is performed to save the pregnant woman from grave and permanent danger to her life or health that cannot be averted in any other way. A person who performs an illegal abortion is subject to ‘rigorous’ [sic] imprisonment for up to five years. If the person has acted for gain or habitually made a profession of abortion, the punishment is increased to three to 10 years’ rigorous [sic] imprisonment and payment of a fine. Such a person may also be prohibited from practising his or her profession. A woman who procures her own abortion is subject to three months to five years in prison. If the pregnancy has been terminated as a result of a grave state of physical or mental distress, especially following rape or incest, or if caused by extreme poverty, a court may consider these conditions as extenuating factors at the time of sentencing.

“Except when impossible, the danger to the pregnant woman's life or health must be certified in writing by a registered medical practitioner. A second doctor must provide a concurrent opinion. The pregnant woman or, if she is incapable, her next of kin or legal representative, is required to give consent to the intervention. In the case of grave and immediate danger that can be averted only by an immediate intervention, these procedural requirements need not be met.

“Although the Government of Eritrea has affirmed its interest in population matters and is in favour of family planning, its efforts have been concentrated on the reorganization of the country after independence. The formulation of population policies in Eritrea is still at an early stage. The Family Planning Association was established in 1992. However, the Association's limited human and financial resources are a major constraint in the expansion and promotion of family planning education and services.” [45]

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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

22.11 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated that:

“Violence against women was pervasive. Domestic violence is a crime; however, domestic violence cases were rarely brought to trial, and there were no legal penalties enshrined into law. Women seldom openly discussed domestic violence because of societal pressures. Such incidents were more commonly addressed, if at all, within families or by clergy. The authorities’ response to domestic violence was hindered by a lack of trained personnel, inadequate funding, and unsupportive societal attitudes.” [4j] (section 5)

22.12 A Canadian IRB reply to a request, published on 28 February 2007, added that “a May 2003 report published by the World Organization Against Torture (Organisation mondiale contre la torture, OMCT) in 2003 identifies dowry payments and honour crimes as contributing to violence against women.” [68g]

For FGM, See [Children](#), [Female Genital Mutilation \(FGM\)](#)

22.13 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees “Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Eritrea” report, published in April 2009, added:

“Violence against women, including domestic violence and rape, is reportedly widespread in Eritrea, despite criminalization of such practices...furthermore, cases of domestic violence are rarely prosecuted and no legal penalties for such crimes are enshrined into law. Abortion is illegal and pregnancy out-of-wedlock is strongly condemned by the community, and could lead to physical and psychological violence, or even death.” [18f] (p27)

22.14 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated that:

“Rape is a crime; however, it was unclear whether spousal rape is illegal. There was no information available on the prevalence of rape. Authorities often responded to reports of rape by encouraging the perpetrator to marry the victim.” [4j] (section 5)

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TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN

- 22.15 Anti-Slavery International, in its working paper 'Trafficking in women forced labour and domestic work in the context of the Middle East and Gulf region', published in 2006, stated:

"Eritrea is mainly a sending country of migrants. It is currently not possible to establish how many are possibly trafficked. Most information available suggests that Eritrean women migrate for employment to the Middle East and Gulf countries, some of them hoping that they will get to Europe. The use of smugglers is widespread, as it is often difficult to leave the country legally. There seem to be no efforts by the Eritrean authorities to address trafficking in persons. As far as the TPO was able to establish, there is no legislation on trafficking and embassies do not provide any services, nor do they help if a trafficked migrant worker is being repatriated. In fact, some of the migrant workers interviewed, made it clear that the repatriation back to Eritrea is the least desired scenario, as they claim to have reasonable grounds to fear compulsory military service and/or some form of punishment for having illegally emigrated from the country." [33]

See also [Trafficking](#)

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23. CHILDREN

OVERVIEW

- 23.01 The CIA World Factbook section on Eritrea (3 September 2009 version) stated that it is estimated that 42.8 per cent of the population is below the age of 15 years, and of these, it is estimated that there are 1,212,848 males and 1,202,240 females. Infant mortality is high, with 43.33 deaths per 1,000 live births. There are no significant gender imbalances in the population at birth (1.03 male to 1 female), in the general child population (1.01 male to 1 female) or in the general adult population (0.96 male to 1 female). [28]. The age of majority is 18, with the individual obtaining the vote. (Child Soldiers Global Report, 2008) [97]. The Behind the Mask profile of Eritrea gives the age of consent as 18 years. [37a]. The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 further noted that the “legal minimum age for marriage for both men and women is 18, although religious entities may bless marriages at younger ages. UNICEF reported that child marriage occurred in the west and in coastal areas.” [4j] (section 5)
- 23.02 Eritrea is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Labour Organisation Minimum Age Convention 1973 (ILO 138) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and acceded on 16 February 2005 to the optional protocol. [97] (Child Soldiers Global Report 2008)

CHILD RIGHTS - CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

- 23.03 On the government institutions overseeing children’s affairs, the US State Department report for 2008 stated that:
- “The Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare is responsible for policies concerning children rights and welfare. The Children’s Affairs Division in the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare covered childcare, counselling, and probation.” [4j] (Children)
- 23.04 The Constitution only 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.” [2] (Article 22)

Child labour

23.05 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 noted that:

“Although the government has a national plan of action to protect children from exploitation in the workplace, it was not enforced effectively, and child labor occurred. The legal minimum age for employment is 18 years, although apprentices may be hired at age 14. The law prohibits children, young workers, and apprentices under age 18 from performing certain dangerous or unhealthy labor, including working in transport industries, working in jobs involving toxic chemicals or dangerous machines, and working underground such as in mines and sewers. It was common for rural children who did not attend school to work on family farms, fetching firewood and water and herding livestock, among other activities. In urban areas, children could be seen in auto mechanic outfits working in car repair shops. Some children worked as street vendors of cigarettes, newspapers, or chewing gum to either supplement household income or at the behest of older children. There were no known instances of forced child labor.” [4j] (section 6)

23.06 The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has reported in a paper ‘The Effective Abolition of Child Labour’, published by Cornell University in 2005, that:

“In Eritrea, the principle of the effective abolition of child labour is recognised in articles 14(2), 16 and 22(3) of the Constitution, in articles 52, 53, 54, 548, 562, 565 and 567 of the Transitional Penal Code and articles 68, 69, 3.17(a) and (1) (2) of the Labour Proclamation of Eritrea no 118/2003, but not in judicial decisions and collective arguments.[Eritrea ratified in 2000 the Minimum Age Convention, 1973(No.138).] Macro Policy No. 13.1.2)a) which concerns basic schooling for children and No. 13.3.2(h) which concerns legal protection for economic and social forms of exploitation are aimed at ensuring the effective abolition of child labour. [Reference is made to the application of ratified Convention No. 138].” [90]

23.07 The ILO paper also explains that:

“Article 69(10 of the Labour Proclamation of Eritrea No. 118/2001) defines hazardous work as:

- (a) work in passengers’/goods’ transport by railway, air and sea in dock side and warehouse involving heavy weight lifting, pulling and pushing or any other related type of labour;
- (b) work connected with toxic chemicals, dangerous machines, electric power generation plants, transformers or transmission lines;
- (c) underground work, such as mines, quarries and similar work; and
- (d) working in sewers and tunnel digging.” [90]

23.08 The ILO paper concluded that:

“The minimum age for engaging in the abovementioned types of work is 18 for both boys and girls. Articles 548(1), 565 and 567 of the Transitional Penal Code of Eritrea and Articles 65 and 68 of Labour Proclamation of Eritrea No. 118/2001 are aimed at eliminating the worst forms of child labour...according to Public Prosecution Head Office there has not been single judgement given against child labour in Eritrea. Child labour in its worst forms (such as sale and/or trafficking; debt bondage, serfdom, forced or compulsory labour; forced recruitment for armed conflict; prostitution; pornography; illicit activities, in particular production and trafficking of drugs, etc) does not exist in the country.” [90]

Children in judicial and penal systems

23.09 There have been reports that during mass detentions and *giffas*, children have been detained with families. [93] (Journal Chrétien, 9 June 2007). There have also been reports that detainees have been separated from dependent children.

See [Freedom of religion: Arrests](#)

CHILDCARE AND PROTECTION

23.10 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 noted that there are “no laws against child abuse and no government programs to combat the problem. Physical punishment was widespread and socially accepted.” [4] (section 5). The Committee on the Rights of the Child, in the ‘Treaty Body Report: Rights of the Child: Eritrea - 6 June 2003’ stated “the Committee is concerned at the lack of available data on ill-treatment of children, including child abuse and corporal punishment. It also notes with concern that corporal punishment is not expressly prohibited by law and is widely practiced in the home and in institutions.” [43] (section 31)

Trafficking of children

23.11 Awate reported in an article dated 24 August 2007, that:

“Through its connections with Sudan’s Eastern Front, the Eritrean regime is now trafficking Eritrean children to the Gulf States to serve as camel jockeys. The ‘legal’ age for camel jockeys is 15 and it is not clear whether the children Eritrea is exporting are 15 or much younger. What is clear is that the Arab Gulf States prefer children who are 8-12 years old.

“According to our source, the children have been taken from the surrounding areas of Tessenei in Western Eritrea. The trafficking is said to be carried out in coordination with officials from the Eastern Front who carry Eritrean diplomatic passports. The cash-starved Eritrean regime has a long history of participating in any commercial activity that will raise money. Shortly after independence, it organized a maid export service charging the mostly young females exorbitant rates for exit visas and work permits in the Middle East.” [50ac]

See [Trafficking](#) for wider overview

Orphans

- 23.12 A British fact-finding mission reported in April 2003 (FFM report, April 2003) that the number of orphans (“orphan is defined as ‘a child who lost either one or both parents or has been abandoned’.”), according to various national surveys, were 90,000 total in 1992–93; 51,000 in need of urgent support in 1999–2000, and in October 2002, 552 orphans were classed as AIDS orphans. [3] (p72). The 2008 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS report gives figures of 105,000 orphan and vulnerable children (OVC) in 2006 of whom 40,000 are related to HIV/AIDS. [98]
- 23.13 The FFM April 2003 report notes that the Eritrean Government’s policy is to avoid institutionalising orphans, and instead of orphanages, the Government promotes reunification programmes, foster care, adoption, and a system of community-based children’s homes (also known as group care). UNICEF (according to the UNICEF representative in Eritrea) regarded the alternative programmes as models of good practice for countries in similar situations. [3] (p73). Children’s homes of 10 to 12 children and two housemothers are the Government’s preferred option to institutional care, if the extended family cannot be used. [3] (p72-73). The review of placements is undertaken by social workers of the Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare, with regular checks, though hampered by lack of guidelines and a lack of skilled staff. [3] (p73)
- 23.14 With regards to the formal orphanage system, the fact-finding mission was informed that:
- “There are several large orphanages within Eritrea adding that Asmara has one of the biggest. Orphanages are either run by the state or Christian NGOs in the country. They are considered by UNICEF to have satisfactory facilities such as adequate bedding, food and clothing provisions etc. Acceptability for entry to an orphanage is universal; there are no unacceptability rules that apply. Eritrea does all that it can for orphans, and the Eritrean public and expatriate community supports them in this policy.” [3] (p73-74)
- 23.15 The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) notes in an article ‘Orphans benefit from Eritrea’s strong family values’, dated 13 September 2007, that:
- “Thanks to the Eritrean tradition of strong family values, the dedication and commitment of the country’s Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare and its close collaboration with UNICEF and other UN agencies, the number of orphans in the country has decreased significantly since 1992. Today Eritrea has 50,000 orphans compared to the 90,000 identified by a national survey in 1992.” [88]

23.16 The UNMEE article also noted:

“One of the projects that has helped to bring about this change is known as Mahzel which has been implemented in Gash Barka region. Ms Leila Blacking, Chief of UNICEF’s Communications Section explained that the project, which is named after a traditional baby carrier made of leather, addresses the problems of the most vulnerable orphans identified by community committees and then referred to a central committee for consideration. In most cases, the orphans are placed with their extended family and the assistance provided covers the cost of looking after the child, and the provision of a means of income for life for the child.” [88]

23.17 The UNMEE article stated that:

“According to the Social Welfare Department statistics more than 27,000 orphans were reunited with blood relatives or host families under the “Mahzel” project. Mr. Habtom Sium, Director of the Department said that one of the preferred options is to place orphans within their extended families. In collaboration with other stakeholders, the department has so far reunited 42,000 with either their extended families or with other families willing to take them in. However, Mr. Habtom also explained that the number of children who have been adopted has not been encouraging. For those orphans who cannot be reunited with their extended families or adopted, a community-based group care programme, which provides group homes, was started in 1996. To date, there are 19 group homes all over the country providing homes for 132 orphans.” [88]

23.18 The UNMEE article explained that:

“In Eritrea, Mr. Habtom said that institutional care for orphans remains a last resort and as a result, institutions in Keren and Mendefera have closed. Asmara Orphanage Centre, established in 1945, is still open but only cares for 278 orphans, compared to 10,000 in 1993. Shelter, food, schooling, counselling, vocational training, guidance, health, sport and recreation are the principal facilities provided by the orphanage. The children are aged between 1 up to 18 years old. Following the growing number of children that HIV/AIDS has orphaned, the Department offers 200 Nakfa a month, per child, to the care-taking family. UNICEF’s Child Protection Officer, Mr. Baerbel Hoefers, said that the Mahzel project deals partly with children who have lost parents to AIDS while stressing that additional fund[s] would be needed to address this issue.” [88]

23.19 The UNMEE article concluded that:

“ ‘Demobilisation of an orphan begins immediately after 18,’ said Mr. Habtom, ‘with all the counselling given to prepare the orphan to lead his future life. The orphan has to have completed high school and in the process of seeking further studies or getting a job.’ Because orphans are less likely to go to school than children within the family unit, education remains a top priority for all programmes involving these children. Mr. Habtom also mentioned a successful education programme, initiated in 1992, aimed at helping street children and young commercial sex workers. More than 9,000 street children have benefitted from the programme and Nakfa10 million has been invested in changing the lifestyle of young prostitutes.” [88]

- 23.20 The International Committee of the Red Cross operates the Red Cross message system and a tracing of relatives system in Eritrea, in relation to families parted by the border conflicts. (ICRC Annual Report 2008 – see references) [40a]

See [Internally Displaced Persons \(IDPs\)](#)

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EDUCATION

- 23.21 Europa Online (accessed on 14 September 2009) 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. According to UNESCO estimates, in 2005/06 primary enrolment included 46.5 percent of children in the relevant age-group (boys 49.8%; girls 43.2%), while the comparable ratio for secondary enrolment was only 25.1% (boys 30.1%; girls 20.1%).” [1a]

- 23.22 The Children’s Legal Centre profile on Eritrea, education system, undated, stated:

“School enrolment is low as a little over half of children attend school and one in five girls make it into secondary schools. Duration of compulsory education: 7 years from the age of 7. Primary (basic) education: elementary school 5 years and middle school 2 years. Secondary education lasts for 4 years at the end of which students take the Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate Examinations. Since 2003, the last year must be taken at a boarding school near the Sawa military training facility.” [44]

See also [Military service and education](#)

- 23.23 The Children’s Legal Centre profile of Eritrea also stated:

“Basic level technical training, students enrol after completion of basic education. Technical schools: 3 years, students enrol upon successful completion of grade 10 and an entrance exam. At the end of year three students take the Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate Examinations.” [44]

23.24 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 report noted that:

“Education through grade seven is compulsory, and tuition-free; however, students were responsible for uniforms, supplies, and transportation, which was prohibitively expensive for many families. Education above grade seven requires a nominal fee and is not compulsory. There was a shortage of schools and teachers at all levels, remedied in part by holding morning and afternoon shifts at schools. According to estimates by the Ministry of Education, the net enrollment rate of school-age children in the 2003-04 school year was approximately 43 percent; the gross elementary (grades one to five) enrollment rate was 71.7 percent. Approximately 75 percent of the population was illiterate. In rural areas, young girls usually left school early to work at home.” [4j] (section 5)

23.25 Europa Online (accessed on 14 September 2009) noted that:

“In 2004/2005 there were an estimated 5,500 students enrolled on bachelor degree courses at the University of Asmara. The University of Asmara was officially closed in September 2006. Higher education would henceforth be provided by six newly-established technical institutes, each associated with a relevant Government ministry. The institutes provide education in the fields of science, technology, business and economics, social sciences, agriculture and marine training.” [1a]

HEALTH AND WELFARE

23.26 The UK Department for International Development (UK DFID) notes in its October 2007 profile of Eritrea that “Eritrea is currently on track to meeting the ‘Universal primary education’; ‘Promoting gender equality & empowering women’ and ‘Reducing child mortality’ [currently, 168 deaths per 100,000 births] goals. With ‘Ensuring environmental sustainability’ Eritrea is on track with the drinking water target, but off track with the sanitation target. On the ‘Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger’ goal there is insufficient data to go on, but with the remaining goals (‘Maternal health’ and ‘Combat AIDS, malaria TB & others’) Eritrea is off track.” [20]

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SPECIAL PROTECTION ISSUES

Military service and education

23.27 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated that:

“The government required all students who reached the final year of secondary school to attend school at a location adjacent to the Sawa military training facility in the western section of the country. Students who did not attend this final year did not graduate and could not sit for examinations that determined eligibility for advanced education. The remote location of this boarding school, security concerns, and societal attitudes reportedly resulted in many female students not enrolling for their final year; however, women could earn an alternative secondary school certificate by attending night school after completing national service. Many students elected to repeat grades or dropped out of high school after the 11th grade to avoid forced conscription into the Sawa military education.

“...attendance at Sawa is compulsory and those who do not attend remain at risk of arrest. Students at Sawa are typically 18 or older, although a fair percentage are as young as 16. The initial three months of June through August are spent undergoing military training. Students who receive poor grades in high school have in the past been sent to the Wi'a military training camp in lieu of being allowed to complete the academic year.” [4j] (section 5)

23.28 On the point of few female students enrolling in Sawa, Michaela Wrong noted in her contribution to a panel discussion at the Royal African Society's 14 July 2005 conference on the UK Eritrean refugee experience, “some of the girls going to Sawa had returned pregnant or deflowered. The perception amongst conservative Eritrean families of what might happen to their daughters could account for the high number of women applying for political asylum abroad.” [80]

23.29 BBC News, in a report dated 11 January 2004, stated that:

“The United Nations children's agency, UNICEF, says the north-east African country of Eritrea is breaking human rights regulations by making children complete the final year of their secondary education at ...Sawa - in the far west of the country near the Sudan border - ...now to matriculate you must leave home and complete Grade 12 in Sawa - a move the government say was taken because they do not have the money to expand secondary schools around the country...those who attend grade 12 in Sawa and matriculate will have the chance to pursue further educational opportunities. For those who choose not to go - their national service begins when they turn 18 and that usually starts with training in Sawa's military camp.” [8q]

See [Military service – School leavers and conscription](#)

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Child soldiers

23.30 The 'Child Soldiers Global Report 2008' stated that:

"Eritrea's Second and Third Periodic Reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child stated that the minimum recruitment age was 18, and that full-time students and those who were temporarily medically unfit could have their service deferred." [97] (Child Soldiers Global Report 2008)

See [Military service and education](#)

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Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

23.31 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 reported that:

"An estimated 89 percent of girls had undergone FGM. Almost all ethnic and religious groups in the country practiced FGM, despite extensive government efforts to curb the practice. In the lowlands, infibulation - the most severe form of FGM - was practiced. In March 2007 the government issued a proclamation declaring FGM a crime and prohibiting its practice. The government and other organizations, including the NUEW [National Union of Eritrean Women] and the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students, sponsored a variety of education programs during the year [2008] that discouraged the practice." [4] (Section 5)

23.32 The Inter-Parliamentary Union (information on Eritrea undated) added further detail:

"Infibulation, excision and sunna are reportedly practised in Eritrea by Muslims and Christians. According to WHO, the prevalence was 97% in 1995 despite positions taken against FGM by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and the National Union of Eritrean Women. However, the IPU has no first-hand official statistics or other details on this subject.

"The IPU has no information on the existence of specific legislation.

"...in 1996, government policy was enunciated to eliminate FGM; to create and enforce legislation prohibiting practices such as FGM; to include in women's health care the prevention of such practices as FGM; and to provide treatment, counselling and rehabilitation for women suffering from FGM-related complications. The Government includes information on FGM in its health and general education programmes. The Ministry of Health carries out government policy relating to FGM and provides training on the topic to primary health care coordinators throughout the country." [54]

- 23.33 The UNICEF Eritrea FGM/C country fact sheet dated 2002 states that there was a drop from 95 per cent prevalence to 89 per cent in 2002, hence the variance between the USSD and IPA figures. It noted that 39 per cent of women had been subjected to infibulation, the most severe form of circumcision, with a further 46 per cent subject to clitoridectomy. The UNICEF data indicates that most circumcision occurs before the age of 12 years, with 84 per cent of circumcisions performed by local circumcision practitioners. [27a]
- 23.34 An Agence France Presse article of 19 March 2005 illustrates the Government's mobilisation to tackle the issue, relating how a National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students group presented a play tackling the issue in a village. [66a]
- 23.35 According to the Suwera Centre for Human Rights report, "The State of Human Rights in Eritrea 2008", published in August 2009:

"On 20 March 2007 the Eritrean government issued Decree No. 2007/158 banning the circumcision of females or female genital mutilation (FGM). The decree includes five articles. Under the fourth article, it states that anyone who practices FGM shall be imprisoned from 2 to 3 years and pay the fine of 5,000 to 10,000 Nakfa (local currency). In cases where circumcision leads to death, the imprisonment can be between 5 to 10 years. The Decree punishes anyone who seeks, instigates or encourages circumcision of females by providing tools or other means by imprisonment from 6 months to one year in addition to paying 3,000 Nakfa. And if the one practicing circumcision is working on [sic] the health services, the punishment is doubled, and the court may suspend professional licenses for a period of up to two years...however, since the issuance of the Decree, no one was reported to have been or put in custody under the stipulations made in this Decree. [22] (p10)

"The government to date hasn't published any statistics about the Decree's contribution in lessening the high rate of the practice of circumcision or FGM in Eritrea which reached 89% according to the Eritrean government's report to [the] CEDAW Committee in New York in 2006." [22] (p10)

See also [Violence Against Women](#)

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DOCUMENTATION

- 23.36 With regards to birth certificates, the US State Department's 'Visa reciprocity schedule' (accessed in January 2009), for Eritrea stated:

"Available. Requests for copies of previously issued birth certificates should be addressed to the Office of Civil Status, Municipality of Asmara; or to the equivalent office of any other municipality offices in which the birth was registered; in person or through a third party having a power of attorney through the Eritrean Embassies/Consulates overseas.

Persons applying for birth certificates should contact the appropriate municipal authorities and present hospital birth records, baptismal certificate, and statement by witnesses familiar with the birth which have been notarized by their zonal court, to be registered at any municipality offices." [4c]

- 23.37 The schedule also added:

"Eritrean National ID cards are only issued in Tigrinya and Arabic to those over 18 years of age and are easily alterable, making proof of Eritrean citizenship difficult to determine....children under the age of 16 can travel on the Eritrean passport of a parent. Each accompanying child must be issued a separate visa, which is affixed to the traveling parent's passport." [4c]

See [Exit-Entry procedures](#)

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24. TRAFFICKING

24.01 The US State Department 2009 Trafficking in Persons report, published in June 2009, stated:

“Eritrea is a source country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. In connection with a national service program in which men aged 18 to 54 and women aged 18 to 47 provide military and non-military service, there have been repeated reports that some Eritreans in military service are used as laborers on some commanding officers’ personal properties, as well as in the construction and agricultural sectors, functions outside the scope of the Proclamation of National Service (No. 82/1995)...reports concerning these workers also noted that, with the exception of a small stipend, pay for their work was remitted directly to the Eritrean government.” [4d]

GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO TACKLE TRAFFICKING

24.02 The US State Department 2009 Trafficking in Persons report stated:

“The Government 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 published neither data nor statistics regarding its efforts to combat human trafficking; it did not respond to requests to provide information for this report.

“...the Government of Eritrea made no known progress in prosecuting and punishing trafficking crimes over the reporting period. Articles 605 and 607 of the Eritrean Criminal Code prohibit trafficking in women and young persons for sexual exploitation; procuring women and children to engage in prostitution is punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment, which is not commensurate with punishments prescribed for other grave crimes. Forced labor and slavery are prohibited, except when authorized by law, under Article 16 of the ratified but suspended Eritrean Constitution, but there are no known laws or enabling proclamations specific to trafficking for labor exploitation. Proclamation 11/199 prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 years of age into the armed forces. The government did not publish information on investigations or prosecutions, if any, of human trafficking offenses during the reporting period.

“...the government made no known efforts to prevent future incidences of trafficking during the reporting period. Eritrean media, all state-owned, made neither public announcements nor media presentations regarding human trafficking during the reporting period...although the government does not publicly acknowledge human trafficking as a problem, an office exists within the Ministry of Labor to handle labor cases, including human trafficking; the accomplishments of this office during 2008 are unknown. Limited resources and a small number of inspectors impeded the ministry’s ability to conduct investigations; the government did not provide information on the number of child labor inspections it carried out in 2008. The government is implementing a national plan of action on child labor that primarily focuses on integrating or reintegrating children with families, communities, and schools as a means of preventing child labor, or rehabilitating children engaged in child labor... Eritrea has not ratified the 2000 UN TIP Protocol.” [4d]

PROTECTION AND SUPPORT SERVICES

24.03 The US State Department 2009 Trafficking in Persons report stated:

“The government did not appear to provide any significant assistance to victims of trafficking during the reporting period. The Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare oversees the government’s trafficking portfolio, but individual cases of transnational human trafficking are reportedly handled by the Eritrean embassy in the country of destination; information regarding embassy efforts to assist trafficking victims was not provided. The government has no known facilities dedicated to trafficking victims and does not provide funding or other forms of support to NGOs for services to trafficking victims. The government severely limited the number of foreign NGOs permitted to operate in the country; of the few remaining NGOs, none operated anti-trafficking programs. During the reporting period, the government operated a program to identify children involved in commercial sexual exploitation and reintegrate them with their families. Nearly 300 children engaged in prostitution received support through this program in 2007; the government did not make available similar information on the programs’ accomplishments in 2008...the government did not ensure that victims are not inappropriately incarcerated, fined, or otherwise penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.” [4d]

See [Trafficking of children](#); [Trafficking of women](#)

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25. MEDICAL ISSUES

GENERAL

- 25.01 Europa World Online, accessed on 14 September 2009, reported that the under five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births, 2006) is 74; HIV/AIDS (% of persons aged 15-49, 2007) is 1.3; physicians (per 1,000 head, 2004) is 0.05 [1a]
- 25.02 Asmera.nl states that “Medical care is improving rapidly in Eritrea, new hospitals and health facilities are opened every year. Modern facilities may not always [be] available outside Asmara...basic non-prescription medicines are available in Asmara, but the selection is not large. Supplies of medicine can be irregular. Visitors should bring a supply of any necessary drugs and prescriptions.” The same site has photographs posted of main hospitals and one of the pharmacies in Asmara. [25a]

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OVERVIEW OF AVAILABILITY OF MEDICAL TREATMENT AND DRUGS

- 25.03 The World Health Organization has estimated there to be three physicians per 100,000 people in Eritrea; which Physicians for Peace in May 2007, estimated, on the basis of a population of 4.8 million people, meant that there were only 144 doctors in Eritrea. [9]
- 25.04 Asmera.nl (no date) states that there are the following hospitals in Asmara:
- “Orota Referral Hospital...gives medical services to people from all over Eritrea with critical condition [sic]; Berhan Aini Eye hospital; St. Mary hospital; Sembel hospital; Hospitem – Ospedale Italiano Ente Morale; Mekane Hiwet hospital. Health centres in Asmara deal with vaccinations, wound dressing, anti-conception [sic], ante-natal care and minor ailments and surgery.” [25a]
- 25.05 In comments submitted to the Advisory Panel on Country Information on 8 March 2006, UNHCR stated:
- “The medical system suffers from an acute lack of resources which include medical personnel, medicines, facilities etc. There is no national cardiac treatment available, no burn unit and very limited trauma care facilities. Also, ongoing medical training is very limited and candidates for medical school may not travel abroad to accept scholarships.” [18e]

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HIV/AIDS

- 25.06 The 2008 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS) report, produced by the Eritrean Ministry of Health, National AIDS and TB Control Division, gives background information on HIV/AIDS in Eritrea:

“Like in other developing countries, HIV/AIDS has become a major threat for Eritrea’s socio-economic development as it affects its major productive labor force. The first AIDS case was reported in 1988. At present, the estimated number of people living with HIV is in the range of 70,000 – 100,000. According to the nationwide ANC sentinel surveillance conducted in 2005, the prevalence of HIV in pregnant women was 2.38%. There were variations between regions/zones, age groups and occupations. In 2006, special surveys were also conducted on the most-at-risk populations, namely CSWs in Asmara, Massawa and long distance truck drivers nationwide. The HIV prevalence rates were 8.08%, 14.67% and 7%, respectively. Another study that was conducted in TB patients in Asmara showed HIV prevalence of 34.33% indicating that co-infection rate was high. In comparison to the 2.38% prevalence in the general population HIV prevalence in the most at risk populations is very high and needs extensive targeted intervention.” [98] (p6)

- 25.07 The main government initiative to combat HIV/AIDS is the HAMSET project launched in 2001: “HAMSET stands for HIV/AIDS, Malaria, Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Tuberculosis. It is a World Bank supported multisectoral project which involves government ministries, civil society (Non Government Organizations, Faith based organizations, private sector and people living with HIV/AIDS).” (UNGASS 2008) [98] (p7)

- 25.08 The UNGASS report 2008, stated, regarding treatment:

“In Eritrea, the estimated number of adults and children with advanced HIV in 2006 were 12,600. Of these only 1,884 were receiving antiretroviral therapy in accordance with the country’s approved treatment protocol, constituting 15%. In 2007 the estimated number of adults and children with advanced HIV were 12,940, of which 3,062 were receiving antiretroviral therapy, constituting 24%. It is worth noting here that ART is provided freely to all who are medically eligible.

“The estimated population infected with HIV in the country lies in the range of 70, 000–100,000. The National Strategic Framework has the provision of treatment, care and support as one of its major goals. In line with this, the MOH has recently finalized a series of national ARV and clinical care guidelines and implementation plans. In 2006, the MOH prepared Eritrean HIV/AIDS Care Manual. The government has acknowledged that with the increase in the number of HIV infected people, they will rely on conversant compassionate providers of care to help them understand a complicated illness, to assist them in coping with HIV-related diseases, and to provide them with comfort and treatment needed to improve the quality and length of their life.

“In order to meet these goals, it would be essential to mobilize all available health care providers and resources in the country (NATCoD, 2006). Due to the relatively low prevalence and urban dominance of the epidemic, 63% of AIDS cases are reported from the hospitals in the capital city. Therefore, the antiretrovirals are provided in these hospitals and other hospitals located in the Zones. Officially ART was launched in the country in September 2005 in five designated sites in the capital city and other towns. Since its launching ART was expanded to the six Zones and by the end of 2007 at least one ART site exists in each Zone. As of 2007, 14 out of the 30 public, military and private hospitals are providing antiretrovirals, constituting 47% of these health facilities.” [98] (p35)

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CANCER TREATMENT

- 25.09 No information could be found regarding treatment of cancer in Eritrea. However, regarding cancer and Eritreans, the Washington University Harborview Medical Center website for collating cultural practices and attitudes towards medicine, EthnoMed.org, noted:

“If an Eritrean becomes ill with cancer or another life-threatening illness, they first follow the western medical plan. Eritreans strongly wish that the family be informed first of a diagnosis or poor prognosis rather than the patient. They often believe that if they return to Eritrea and are treated with plant roots or other modalities they will be healed. They feel that many treatments in Western medicine allow the disease to spread further in the body.” [69]

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KIDNEY DIALYSIS

- 25.10 Shabait reported in November 2008 that “dialysis treatment for patients suffering from kidney disease has been introduced in Eritrea. Accordingly, Orotta Referral Hospital has introduced four modern equipments [sic] to this end.” The report also stated that “Eritrean nurses have been trained to properly monitor the newly introduced equipments [sic]”, and also that “previously, patients who require dialysis treatment used to travel abroad for the treatment.” [26a]

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MENTAL HEALTH CARE

25.11 The World Health Organisation (WHO) 'Mental Health Atlas 2005' stated in its Eritrea country profile that though there is a mental health policy 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. [41a] (p1-2). On actual provision, the WHO Mental Health Atlas states "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." [41a] (p2). The WHO Mental Health Atlas 2005 notes that phenobarbital, chlorpromazine, and diazepam are available at the primary health care level. [41a] (p3).

25.12 The WHO published a report in 2006 about the mental health care system in Eritrea. This report stated that:

"In 1971 the [Eritrean] government built a special neuro-psychiatric hospital in southwest Asmara, called St. Mary's Hospital. This hospital was planned to provide 120 beds, a number that increased significantly in time to a today's number of 160 beds. The wards have since been changed from big sleeping hallways of 36 beds, to smaller compartments with 4 to 6 beds. The hospital now consists of several wards, which make up the inpatient department, as well as an outpatient department. [41b] (p6)

"...in 2005, the mental hospital staff consisted of one psychiatrist/director, one matron, one administrator, four head nurses, eight psychiatric nurses, one psychology graduate, eleven general nurses and twenty-two health assistants, supported by a laboratory and a pharmacy. [41b] (p6)

"...there are two wards for male patients (one for civilians and one for military patients) and one for female military and civilian patients. Until now, the only way to restrain patients has been to chain them to their beds by their ankles. About one-third or more of all patients are chained. [41b] (p7)

"...the outpatient department is open 5.5 days a week. About 10 new patients are seen on a daily basis, which means about 2,700 new patients a year are served. Sometimes patients are referred, but the majority of patients refer themselves. Most patients (both in and outpatients) come from the Asmara region. [41b] (p7)

"...during the last few years the MoH [Ministry of Health] has been training around 60 primary care workers in basic mental health knowledge; physicians as well as nurses in one week training are trained to diagnose and treat the most frequent psychiatric disorders and to do follow up...although some of these professionals are able to apply their knowledge, the majority are not able to do this since there is not a good distribution system of psychotropic drugs and they do not have access to these drugs. [41b] (p7)

“...Eritrea’s mental health policy was last revised in 1998 and includes the following components: developing community health services, downsizing large mental hospitals, developing a mental health component in primary health care, human resources, involvement of users and families, advocacy and promotion, human rights protection of patients, equity of access across different groups, financing, quality improvement an a monitoring system. [41b] (p10)

“In addition, a list of essential medicines is present. These medicines include Antipsychotics, Anxiolytics, Antidepressants, Mood stabilizers and Antiepileptic drugs. [41b] (p10)

“...according to the data for the year 2004, the total number of human resources working in mental health facilities or private practice is 0.83 per 100,000 [of the] population. The breakdown per 100,000 [of the] population is as follows: 0.06 psychiatrists (2 psychiatrists), 0.06 other medical doctors (2 medical doctors not specialized in psychiatry), 0.33 nurses (12 nurses), 0.03 (1 psychologist), but no social workers or occupational therapists.” [41b] (p18)

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

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26. HUMANITARIAN ISSUES

26.01 In June 2009, United Nations IRIN reported that:

“Eritrea is facing a food crisis, but aid workers say they cannot fully determine its severity as they are unable to assess the situation because of travel restrictions and the government's policy of ‘self-reliance’.

“The rains have failed again this year, in what is one of the driest regions in Africa. One aid agency report said the country had produced only about 30 percent of its food requirements in 2008/09.

“According to a recent report by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), rates of acute malnutrition in the northern provinces of Gash Barka and Anseba were above the emergency threshold of 15 percent; by February 2009, admission rates to therapeutic feeding centres were already two to six times greater than in 2008.

“UNICEF warned that higher global food prices could be affecting up to 2 million Eritreans, more than half the population of 3.6 million. UN agencies have projected that the 1.3 million people living below the poverty line would suffer most.

“...the average family cannot afford the most popular staple grains, such as teff, which retails at \$8 per kg in Asmara, and is used to make injera, a pancake that is the mainstay of an Eritrean meal. A family of four would consume at least 25kg of teff a month, amounting to \$200, so teff has become a luxury rather than a staple.” [19c]

26.02 According to the UNICEF Humanitarian Action Report 2009:

“The border stalemate between Eritrea and Ethiopia continues to hamper the economic situation in the country, while the failure of rains and the high food prices pose an additional burden to the humanitarian situation in Eritrea, which is already being made vulnerable by poverty, chronic food insecurity and malnutrition. The poor performance of the short rains and the delayed onset of the main rainy season are raising concerns for a looming drought: Eritrea, which lies in the Horn of Africa, is located in a drought-prone area, and is still suffering from the impact of the previous drought in 2006. Those particularly at risk are the estimated 85,500 malnourished children; 300,000 pregnant and lactating women; an estimated 800,000 urban poor and the population living in drought-affected areas, requiring close situation monitoring and assistance. The 22,300 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were resettled or returned to their communities of origin between 2007 and 2008 require continued assistance in basic social services. Mine and unexploded ordnance accidents have increased significantly since 2007, requiring accelerated efforts in mine-risk education in the affected areas.” [27b]

See [Economy](#)

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27. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

27.01 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 noted:

“The law and unimplemented constitution provide for freedom of movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation; however, the government restricted some of these rights in practice. While citizens could generally travel freely within the country and change their place of residence, the government restricted travel to some areas within the country, particularly along the border with Sudan and Ethiopia. In August [2008] the government suspended exit visas and passport services to its citizens. By year’s end [2008] the government provided document and travel service[s] only to known government loyalists. The government did not accept applications from persons requiring judgments from an adjudicator. 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 other 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.” [4j] (section 2d)

27.02 The Human Rights Watch 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report 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. [29e] (p62)

“Local government authorities at the village or neighborhood level maintain detailed records of local populations...each zone is controlled by a subcommittee drawn from the local population - in essence civilians are employed to keep an eye on each other. [29e] (p63)

“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.” [29e] (p63)

27.03 Foreign nationals in Asmara need permission to travel outside the city, as noted in the “Travel Advice” section of the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office website:

“All foreign nationals, including resident diplomats, are required to apply ten days in advance for travel permits to leave Asmara - these are not always granted. This means that diplomatic staff from the British Embassy are unable to offer emergency assistance to British nationals outside Asmara quickly.” [10h]

See also [Round-ups \(Giffa\)](#)

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28. INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE (IDPs)

28.01 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 noted:

“Approximately 19,000 IDPs from the conflict with Ethiopia were permanently resettled during the previous year [2007]. Approximately 6,625 IDPs remained in two camps in the Debub zone, and approximately 1,250 refugees remained in an IDP camp in the Southern Red Sea Zone. There also was a large but unknown number of IDPs residing outside camps during the year. The government allowed UN organizations to provide assistance to IDPs. During the year [2008] all remaining IDPs were resettled, although some remained living in tents.” [4j] (Section 2d)

28.02 A report published by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre in February 2009 stated:

“In early 2006, the government stepped up its return and resettlement efforts with the goal of returning all IDPs to their home areas or moving them to resettlement villages. In March 2006, it estimated that there were almost 8,900 displaced households in the border regions of Gash Barka and Debub (Government of Eritrea, March 2006). This would correspond roughly to 45,000 individuals. Of those, over 30,000 people has returned to their areas of origin or resettled by September 2007, including an estimated 10,000 people who had been living with host communities.

“...various UN sources have reported that by mid-2008, all IDPs in Eritrea had either returned or been resettled...according to a UNDP source, some IDPs were still living with hosts at the beginning of 2009 (UNDP-Eritrea, January 2009).

“...on the political front, the continuing impasse over the demarcation of the border and the status of the town of Badme presents an ongoing serious risk of renewed conflict and a major source of instability in the Horn of Africa. Following the Ethiopian government’s refusal to accept the virtual demarcation of the border by the EEBC, the unilateral Eritrean implementation and expulsion of UNMEE peacekeepers significantly increased the risk of new conflict.” [84]

ERITREANS FROM ETHIOPIA

28.03 A 2003 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report about the mass expulsions of Eritreans from Ethiopia and of Ethiopians from Eritrea stated:

“Expellees were asked to fill out a detailed registration form and were issued the same type of registration card that Eritrean refugees returning from exile received. Once registered, the deportees were entitled to the standard government assistance for returning refugees: including short-term housing, food, and settlement aid; medical coverage; and job placement assistance.” [29a] (pp28-29)

28.04 The same HRW report added that:

“For the first year of the war, the ERREC issued the expellees an identification card known as a ‘green card’ or ‘Repatriated Refugees Card’...the card did not identify the citizenship of the holder. ERREC’s clerks were instructed to note, under the heading ‘remarks,’ that the individual or individuals named on the card had been ‘forcibly expelled from Ethiopia’. The cards were written in both Tigrigna and Arabic, the two languages of Eritrea. In mid-1999, the ERREC began issuing expellees from Ethiopia a new identification card, labelled ‘Identification Card For Eritreans Expelled from Ethiopia,’ and also known as the ‘blue card’. The information on the card largely corresponded to that on the green card, although the blue card used English in addition to Tigrigna (sic) and Arabic.” [29a] (p28 footnote)

28.05 The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in its Eritrea Field Newsletter of 12 June 2009, which outlined the activities of the ICRC in Eritrea in 2008 stated:

“The ICRC, in accordance with its mandate, focused on meeting the needs of people still affected by the 1998-2000 international armed conflict with Ethiopia. It worked mainly in the war-affected southern border regions. In Gash Narka, it remained the only international aid agency with a permanent presence. The ICRC programmes were carried out in cooperation with the authorities and local communities, and coordinated with international organizations still active in Eritrea.

“...furthermore, the ICRC assisted in repatriating people who wished to return to Ethiopia or Eritrea and, when requested, reunited children and other vulnerable people with their families across the border. While maintaining the tracing services, the ICRC delegation started handing over the Red Cross Messages network to the Red Cross Society of Eritrea so that relatives could communicate across the closed border.

“...families separated by the war continued to be able to communicate across the closed Eritrea-Ethiopia border through the tracing and RCM services. At their request, people of Eritrean or Ethiopian origin were repatriated and the children, the elderly and the sick, reunited with their families across the border, under ICRC auspices. This remained their only legal means of returning to their country of origin. Following ICRC interventions, both governments continued to approve the reunification of couples of mixed origin. This mainly concerned women of Eritrean origin joining their husbands in Ethiopia, but in March [2009], for the first time, a woman of Ethiopian origin, with her nine-year-old son, was reunited with her husband in Eritrea. Prior to repatriations, 148 needy people obtained their exit visas from Eritrea with ICRC financial support. People also had their official documents forwarded so that they could apply for jobs or pursue their studies.” [40c]

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29. FOREIGN REFUGEES

REFUGEES IN ERITREA

- 29.01 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated the basic situation regarding people seeking refuge in Eritrea:

“The law and unimplemented constitution do not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol, and the government did not establish a system for providing protection to refugees. As a result the government cannot provide legal refugee or asylum status; however, in practice the government provided some protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened and provided temporary protection to approximately 135 persons from Sudan and 4,789 persons from Somalia on a prima facie basis. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in assisting refugees who were not from Ethiopia.

“The government requires noncitizens to pay an annual fee for a residency card; there was no discrimination regarding nationality. The fee was 500 Nakfa (\$34), which was used to demonstrate that a foreigner was not indigent. If the foreigner could not pay the fee he was first referred to the ICRC for repatriation, but if he refused repatriation, he was incarcerated for 60 days, at which point the cycle began again.” [4j] (section 2d)

- 29.02 Awate reported on 24 March 2008 that Sudanese, Ethiopian and Somali opposition groups amongst refugee populations, who had formerly been welcomed by the Eritrean Government, were finding that they had become victims of the general economic collapse as the Eritrean Government was no longer able to financially support them. Thus, Sudanese, Ethiopian and Somali opposition groups are in the process of relocating from Eritrea. [50n]

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ETHIOPIANS IN ERITREA

29.03 A Human Rights Watch 2003 report noted that:

“The legal status of Ethiopian residents in Eritrea who had not sought Eritrean nationality at the time of the war’s outbreak [1998 – 2000 war between Ethiopia and Eritrea] 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.” [29a] (p31)

29.04 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2005 reported that “the government granted 19 Ethiopians who deserted the Ethiopian army, residency status.” [4f]. BBC News reported on 1 December 2005 that “at least seven Ethiopian soldiers have defected to Eritrea while on a private training course in Israel, the Israeli foreign ministry has confirmed. The Eritrean ambassador in Israel said the soldiers – reported to be of Eritrean descent – arrived at his house and asked for political asylum.” [8p]

29.05 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2006 added:

“Another 1,400 Ethiopians sought asylum with the UNHCR, but the government refused to issue them exit visas...the UNHCR was accommodating 1,100 Ethiopians in urban areas, an increase from only 5 cases in 2002. The government issued residency permits to Ethiopians living in the country for a fee; however, it did not issue them exit visas. Ethiopians unable to pay the residency permit fee were not legally eligible for employment. The government prohibited the ICRC from continuing its program of purchasing residency permits for Ethiopians unable to afford the annual fee.” [4k] (section 3)

29.06 There are 16,000 Ethiopians estimated to have temporary residence in Eritrea, including 600 Ethiopians in the Gash Barka region “to which the UNHCR had no access or responsibility” (US State Department Human Rights report for 2006). The US State Department Human Rights report for 2006 continues “the Government issued residency permits to Ethiopians living in the country for a fee; however, it did not issue them exit visas.” [4k] (section 3)

29.07 A British fact-finding mission of April 2003 reported that:

“One international observer commented to the delegation that since 2000 the attitude towards Ethiopians had changed, not as a result of any Government led initiative but as a result of a shift in the attitude of the public and police towards them. The inability to earn a living had been a leading cause for those that chose to be repatriated. Without the possibility of work they have little option but to leave. The source added that since the end of the war not only have societal attitudes changed, but with so much of the potential workforce in the military it is possibly a lot easier to gain employment now if one is registered as a resident foreigner.” [3] (p45)

- 29.08 “Ethiopia expelled 70,000 Eritreans living in the country, a move strongly criticized by Amnesty International and other human rights organizations. Eritrea subsequently encouraged a similar number of Ethiopians to leave Eritrea.” (Europa Online, accessed on 14 September 2009) [1a]
- 29.09 The Canadian IRB noted in a reply to a request dated 20 February 2007 that the ICRC had continued to assist with repatriations. The UNMEE had monitored the process and the reply added that:
- “The UN Secretary-General noted that ‘persons of Ethiopian origin continue to face discriminatory practices in Eritrea, including the demand for payment or high ‘repatriation clearance fees’. He further noted that persons of Eritrean extraction were reportedly detained prior to their repatriation. In several of his reports to the UN Security Council, the Secretary-General reiterated appeals to the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea ‘to ensure that the repatriations remain voluntary and that they are carried out in a proper and dignified manner’.” [68c]
- 29.10 In comments submitted to the Advisory Panel on Country Information on 8 March 2006, UNHCR stated “Ethiopians must renew residency permits every year not [every] six months,” [18e], correcting a USSD report for 2005 statement, “Ethiopian nationals reportedly were singled out for arrest because they were unable to pay the necessary fees to renew their residency permits every six months.” [4f]. Awate has reported that the Ethiopian opposition groups that had found refuge in Eritrea had, by March 2008, essentially disintegrated, with some groups (AFD, OLF, CUD and EPPF) disintegrating from internal ethnic fissures, and others (TPDM, EPPF) crumbling after financial support from the Eritrean Government dwindled away. [50n]
- 29.11 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.” [40b]

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30. CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALITY

- 30.01 The Eritrean Nationality Proclamation No.21/1992 published in April 1992 details the criteria and law regarding Eritrean Nationality. [7]
- 30.02 On 27 January 2004, the Home Office received a letter from the Eritrean Embassy in London clarifying certain points with regards to obtaining Eritrean nationality from the UK. The letter stated that:
- a A person who is with an Eritrean father/mother would be eligible for Eritrean nationality as long as the person provides three witnesses.
 - b The political views of the three witnesses are not relevant to establishing the nationality.
 - c The political views of the applicant for nationality are not relevant to establishing eligibility for nationality and obtaining an Eritrean passport.
 - d The voting in the 1993 Referendum is not a necessary precondition to establishing nationality.
 - e Paying a 2% tax on nationals overseas is not a precondition for eligibility for Eritrean nationality and obtaining a passport.
 - f Claiming refugee status overseas does not preclude eligibility for Eritrean nationality or obtaining an Eritrean passport.
 - g All application forms are filled in person by the applicant at the Embassy's consular section and has [sic] to be authorised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Eritrea. No application forms out of the standard provided by the Embassy are accepted." [14]
- 30.03 A British fact -finding mission reported on 29 April 2003 that "if a person's parents or grandparents were born in Eritrea you will certainly be entitled to Eritrean nationality but will have to prove this." It was also confirmed that applicants would not be asked about their views, political or otherwise. [3] (p46-48)

THREE WITNESSES

- 30.04 The British fact-finding mission [FFM] report published on 29 April 2003 contains the most detail about 'the three witnesses method'. [3] (p48). The FFM states "An applicant can call on any 'three witnesses' to verify that the applicant is an Eritrean national. The 'three witnesses' must be Eritreans who hold an Eritrean identification card or passport. Though every adult is supposed to have a national ID card and anyone holding an Eritrean passport would be in possession of that card, identity records are not centralised and it is often difficult to find information about an individual...while documentation can help a person to prove nationality the Eritrean government now relies on the 'three witness' rule." [3] (p48)
- 30.05 Furthermore, it noted that "they [an applicant] can choose any three Eritreans in the world that they know personally. The person abroad will have to go to the Eritrean embassy of that country in order to answer questions. These are standard questions about how long they have known the person, relationship etc. They sign a piece of paper that is then faxed onwards." [3] (p48)

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THE 1993 REFERENDUM

30.06 The British Embassy in a letter dated 2 July 2001 noted that “the Political Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs...was quite clear that the 1993 referendum plays no part in whether or not someone is entitled to Eritrean nationality.” [10a]. The FFM of April 2003 reiterated the point, adding:

“Participation had importance when Eritrea first achieved independence but now over a decade later this is no longer the case. The problem is that many people were not able to vote in the referendum for one reason or other and it would not be reasonable or logical to apply such criteria after a decade of independence. Some had been in inaccessible areas, some had been sick, some out of the country, some were too young.” [3] (p49)

30.07 The 2003 FFM report further noted that:

“Over time such a criterion has lessened in importance to the point now where it is of little importance...the initial vote was conducted largely thanks to the machinery of the Ethiopian government. They held the central records. We [the Eritrean authorities] have most of the information now but since the border war, we can no longer check any discrepancies. Therefore we cannot always verify if a person voted in the referendum or not.” [3] (p49-50)

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MIXED MARRIAGES AND MIXED BIRTH

The following paragraphs relate to reunions of partners in mixed Eritrean and Ethiopian marriages.

30.08 A British fact-finding mission reported on 29 April 2003 that “in most cases a mixed marriage will prove to be no problem if both partners are already in Eritrea. If they are split between Eritrea and Ethiopia then the ICRC arranges visits and temporary reunions...if both partners are in Eritrea...the non-Eritrean would apply for a residence permit. This is also the situation if a person is unable to prove nationality. While a person attempts to prove their credentials, a person is given a residence permit, these are renewable every six-months. With most residence permits a person is allowed to work...in cases where a person is part of an expelled mixed marriage they will if at all possible be dealt with faster...the Eritrean Government is very sympathetic to such cases.” [3] (p50)

30.09 This 2003 FFM report also noted that:

“In the case of a mixed birth a person would generally not have too many problems as long as they can prove that they have Eritrean roots. This would make them eligible for Eritrean nationality under the normal procedures of the nationality proclamation.” [3] (p50)

30.10 In comments prepared for the Advisory Panel on Country Information meeting on 8 March 2005, UNHCR stated [regarding family reunion and the ICRC arranging visits between split families] that:

“In reality, this is extremely difficult for the majority of cases and not all are able to avail themselves of the ICRC mechanism, which is the only possibility for travel between the two countries. A person must decide to move permanently to the other country if they are to repatriate with ICRC and often, Ethiopia will not accept the arrival of an Eritrean spouse and vice versa.” [18b]

30.11 In comments prepared for the Advisory Panel on Country Information meeting on 8 March 2005, UNHCR stated [regarding nationality issues]:

“If a couple is in a mixed marriage, it is very difficult to acquire Eritrean nationality for the foreign spouse who wishes to do so. With regard to dual nationality, the person will only be regarded as an Eritrean citizen if s/he is in Eritrea and no consideration will be taken to the other nationality, an issue which has caused some friction between certain western diplomatic missions and the Government of Eritrea, especially with regard to detention cases.” [18b]

30.12 This 2003 FFM report also stated that:

“There are over three million people in Eritrea, as well as hundreds of thousands in the Diaspora (Eritreans abroad)...even if they came from Ethiopia or Sudan they would have known many other Eritreans. It is a matter of history that those in Ethiopia kept close contact with family in Eritrea, even those that stayed in Ethiopia after independence. Most formed ‘clubs’ to celebrate and remember their culture. Those in the Sudan lived in ‘Eritrean communities and camps’...many tens of thousands of those returned from Ethiopia and Sudan had their stay regulated and have Eritrean passports.’ not only will we [the authorities] allow witnesses from all over the globe but we will follow up claims. So for example if someone claims to be from a certain village we will send word to that community so that they can get the witnesses to come forward.” [3] (p49)

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31. FORGED AND FRAUDULENTLY OBTAINED DOCUMENTS

31.01 According to information from a Response to Information Request, dated 8 July 2008, published by the Research Directorate of the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), the Eritrean government is aware that some Eritrean national identity cards have been fraudulently obtained but does not know how common this practice is. The Response to Information Request also refers to a report published by the "The Indian Ocean Newsletter" dated 3 March 2008, about Ethiopian refugees buying Eritrean national identity cards in 'Khartoum from Eritrean intermediaries'. [68j] (p50)

31.02 Information dated 8 July 2008 from another IRB Response to Information Request, stated that:

"To obtain the [Eritrean] national identity card, a person has to prove that he/she is [of] Eritrean origin. A person is said to be [of] Eritrean origin, if he/she was a resident in Eritrea in 1933. Any one born from such a person (either father or mother, or both) is also considered [to be of] Eritrean origin.

- This can be proved:

- by presenting a certificate of birth,

- three witnesses, who are above the age of 40, or

- any other relevant document." [68d]

31.03 According to the US State Department's 'Visa reciprocity schedule' (accessed in January 2009):

"Eritrean passports do not show the applicant's nationality...posts [American diplomatic posts] may issue visas in the Eritrean passports, but should insist that another document indicating nationality...is also presented with the passport when possible. Eritrean National ID cards are only issued in Tigrinya and Arabic to those over 18 years of age and are easily alterable, making proof of Eritrean citizenship difficult to determine." [4c]

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32. EXIT-ENTRY PROCEDURES

32.01 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 noted that:

“In general citizens had the right to return; however, citizens 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 upon their departure from the country. Applications to return to the country filed by ‘citizens’ living abroad were considered on a case-by-case basis if the applicant had broken the law, contracted a serious contagious disease, or was declared ineligible for political asylum by other governments.” [4j] (section 2d)

32.02 On 1 June 2006, new regulations were brought in by the Eritrean authorities regarding the entry into, and travel within Eritrea, by foreign nationals. The Government of Eritrea required all visitors and foreign residents to obtain travel permits for any travel outside Asmara city limits. [4b] (US Overseas Security Advisory Council [OSAC], 19 March 2008); [38a] (*Eritrea Daily*, 31 May 2006). The OSAC travel warning stated that “the GSE [Government of the State of Eritrea] has cited security and safety concerns as the reasons for requiring travel permits for all travel outside Asmara.” [4b]

See [Freedom of Movement](#)

REQUIREMENT FOR EXIT VISAS

32.03 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated that:

“Citizens and some foreign nationals were required to obtain exit visas to depart the country. There were numerous cases where foreign nationals were delayed in leaving for up to two months when they applied for an exit visa. 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 favour with, or seen as critical of, the government.” [4j] (section 2d)

32.04 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 added:

“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).” [4j] (section 2d)

- 32.05 A report published by Awate in September 2008 alleged that there is a visa regime agreed by the Eritrean and the Sudanese Governments that targets all visa Eritreans leaving Eritrea via Sudan. The report also referred to the denial of visas by Egypt to Eritrean passport holders. The report stated that:

“In exchange for Euros and US dollars, the Eritrean embassy in Khartoum issues Eritrean passports to escapees who secure visas (mostly to the Arab Gulf states.) Ironically, the Eritrean citizens would have been shot on sight if the Eritrean government border patrol had spotted them days earlier. Once a visa is secured for a foreign country, they need to get an exit visa from Sudan’s immigration office. Following its reconciliation with Eritrean officials, the Sudanese government has instructed its immigration office not to issue exit visas to Eritreans unless they bring a no-objection letter from the Eritrean embassy in Khartoum. Prior to issuing the no-objection letter, the Eritrean embassy requires the applicants to fill lengthy forms (their relatives, addresses, etc) and transfers the information to the Eritrea embassies in their destination country. This assures their loyalty once they arrive in the foreign land.” [50aj] (Awate report “For PFDJ, Yesterday’s Target is Today’s Income Opportunity”, 13 September 2008)

- 32.06 The Human Rights Watch 2009 report “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea”, added:

“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.’” [29e] (p63-64)

- 32.07 Awate reported in May 2009 that:

“As of May 1, 2009, all exit visa permits for the unfit and people who leave the country permanently (after attesting, in writing, that they forfeit their right to return) are now prohibited. The prohibition against providing visas to those who haven’t ‘fulfilled their national duty’ (i.e. military service until the age of 50 or more) still stands.” [50d]

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REQUIREMENT FOR ERITREANS LIVING ABROAD TO PAY TAX

32.08 The Human Rights Watch 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report 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. [29e] (p75)

“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. [29e] (p75)

“... 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. [29e] (p76)

“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.’ ” [29e] (p76)

See [Freedom of Movement](#)

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ILLEGAL EXIT FROM ERITREA

32.09 An Awate report, dated 25 September 2008, stated that:

“The exile to Ethiopia and Sudan, which was averaging about 300 a month, has nearly doubled in recent months...most of the embassies in Eritrea do not provide consular services. Consequently, Eritreans used to go to neighbouring Kenya, Sudan and Djibouti to get entry visas...most Eritreans under the age of 50 are supposed to be enlisted either in the armed forces or the reserve: the exit visas used to be granted only to senior citizens and Eritreans requesting to be re-united with expatriates. Now, Eritrea’s immigration office has issued a blanket denial for all passport and exit visa requests from Eritrea.” [50q]

32.10 Leaving Eritrea illegally can have serious consequences for the individuals who attempt to do so, as reflected in the Human Rights Watch 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report:

“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.’ [29e] (p39)

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33. TREATMENT OF ERITREAN REFUGEES

OVERVIEW

- 33.01 The Human Rights Watch 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report stated:

“Eritrea is currently among the top refugee-producing nations in the world. Fleeing the country is truly a last resort because the conditions facing refugees abroad are appalling and the punishments inflicted on asylum seekers who are forcibly returned are terrible, including torture and death. The Eritrean government considers leaving the country without a valid exit visa a crime, and absconding from national service is viewed as tantamount to treason. [29e] (p65)

“Leaving Eritrea is not an easy undertaking. As described above, heavily patrolled borders, mine-fields, and a shoot-to-kill policy make escape from Eritrea difficult. Despite this, thousands of people are leaving the country. The majority of refugees end up in Ethiopia and Sudan in overcrowded refugee camps. An increasing number try to make it to Europe via Sudan and Libya. They face difficult conditions crossing the Sahara and risk detention and extortion at the hands of Libyan and Sudanese police. [29e] (p65)

“...the scale of the Eritrean outflux is increasing. In 2007 the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants estimated around 600 Eritreans were crossing into Ethiopia every month. In January 2009 the Ethiopian government claimed the number had grown to 900 a month. In 2007 the UN said that at least 10,000 Eritrean refugees arrived in Sudan and by 2008 this had apparently increased to at least 13,000 known new arrivals, likely a conservative estimate given that many of them do not apply for refugee status and remain in Sudan illegally, in transit for Libya. According to UNHCR, in 2008 more than 3,000 Eritreans entered Italy, the main entry point for Eritrean asylum-seekers to the European Union, an increase of 50 percent over the 2,000 Eritreans who arrived in 2007.” [29e] (p65-66)

TREATMENT OF RETURNED FAILED ASYLUM SEEKERS

- 33.02 Individuals who have been arrested or detained, having returned voluntarily and not as failed asylum seekers, include Aster Yohannes, wife of one of the G15/G11 political detainees, and Saleh Ali Sheikh and his wife Saret Ramadhan, as reported by Amnesty International on 19 May 2004:

“Eritreans returning from abroad, like Aster Yohannes, risk arbitrary detention if they return to Eritrea and are suspected of opposing the government – even if they have a foreign passport. In May 2003 two Eritrean nationals, Saleh Ali Sheikh, and his wife, Saret Ramadhan, were reportedly detained on arrival from Saudi Arabia at Asmara airport and ‘disappeared’.” [5c] (p22)

See [Police - Arbitrary Arrest and Detention](#)

ERITREAN REFUGEES IN MALTA

- 33.03 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report stated:

“A Mediterranean island on the periphery of the European Union, Malta is one of the first countries in Europe reached by migrants from Eritrea who make the trip across Sudan and Libya and then pay smugglers to take them on the boat voyage. [29e] (p71)

“Malta has a bad record of abuses against asylum seekers and of returning people to Eritrea, so it is not a destination of choice for those fleeing repression. In 2002 Malta returned 232 Eritreans who were imprisoned upon their return, and many of them tortured. In 2004 Amnesty International reported that some of them had died in custody.” [29e] (p72)

- 33.04 In September and October 2002, 220 Eritreans were returned by the Maltese Government. Amnesty International’s report ‘You have no right to ask’, published on 19 May 2004, noted that the returnees “[were] forcibly deported...back to Eritrea, where they were immediately detained on arrival to Asmara and sent to nearby Adi Abeto military detention centre.” [5c] (p23)

- 33.05 AI added in the same report that:

“In response to Amnesty International’s concern about the deportations, the Maltese government said that it was ‘not in possession of any evidence that any ill-treatment was afforded to the Eritreans repatriated from Malta’ and that the Eritrean Director for Refugees ‘was reported to have rejected any allegations of ill-treatment’.

“Some 200 other Eritreans - also mostly army deserters or conscription evaders – remained in detention in Malta in poor conditions, some appealing in court against the threat of deportation. The Maltese authorities were much criticized for their treatment of the Eritreans and other migrants and asylum-seekers, at a time when Malta was applying to join the European Union and therefore expected to comply with European Union asylum standards and establish refugee status determination procedures more in line with international standards. In December 2003 they released most of the remaining Eritrean asylum-seekers to a non-custodial hostel. The rest were released in February 2004 and resettlement was being considered for all 105 Eritrean asylum-seekers still in Malta. (29) More Eritreans reportedly arrived in Malta in April 2004 after encountering difficulties at sea.” [5c] (p23)

- 33.06 There have been reports on the treatment of the returnees from Malta. AI stated in the 19 May 2004 report:

“As Amnesty International learned later, women, children and those over the conscription age limit of 40 years were released after some weeks in Adi Abeto prison but the rest of the Malta deportees – mostly army deserters – were kept in incommunicado detention and tortured. Some EPLF veterans among them were sent separately to ‘Tract B’ military prison in Asmara. The rest were transferred to the secret Dahlak Kebir island prison in December 2002. Later the civilians (about 95) were sent to secret mainland prisons in July 2003, leaving behind about 85 conscript deserters in Dahlak Kebir. About 30 later escaped and fled again to Sudan, where they sought UNHCR protection. They gave testimonies of their detention and torture to Amnesty International.” [5c] (p23)

- 33.07 The HRW 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report added:

“Since 2002 there have been no reports of Malta returning any other Eritreans. However, according to an aid official, asylum seekers who arrive in Malta, including Eritreans, are detained for long periods in sub-standard conditions. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention visited Malta in January 2009 and raised concerns about Malta’s automatic detention of immigrants, including asylum seekers, for long periods without recourse to a court of law.” [29e] (p72)

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ERITREAN REFUGEES IN LIBYA

- 33.08 In September 2006, Human Rights Watch published ‘Stemming the flow: abuses against migrants, asylum seekers and refugees’, which includes information on the Libyan Government’s treatment of Eritrean refugees and migrants in Libya. In chapter VI, the report outlines the poor conditions that Eritrean refugees and migrants are detained in, such as in Kufra, with deaths, neglect and abuse reported. [29b]
- 33.09 Amnesty International (AI) issued an Urgent Alert dated 8 February 2007 that expressed concern over the possible forced return of 430 Eritrean nationals, at that moment held in detention by the Libyan authorities. It stated:

“Reports suggest that the Libyan authorities may have beaten and raped or sexually abused some detainees, and some detainees may even have died in custody as a result of such torture or other ill-treatment. According to Amnesty International’s information, of the 430 detainees, 130 detainees, including several women and children, are detained at a detention centre in al-Marj, 1,000 km from the Libyan capital Tripoli, while the remaining 300 are detained in Misratah, about 200km from Tripoli.”

“...in August 2006, 300 Eritreans were detained in Libya and threatened with deportation. It however appears that they were not deported although the whereabouts of some of them remains unknown (see UA 225/06, MDE 19/004/2006, 24 August 2006).” [5q]

33.10 AI was further alarmed about returns to Eritrea in January 2008, with news of the Libyan Government's programme for the deportation of over one million illegal immigrants. The BBC reported on 17 January 2008 that Human Rights Watch had roundly condemned the Libyan Government initiative. [8t]

33.11 The Human Rights Watch 2009 "Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea" report added:

"Libya has a well-documented history of abuses against migrants including forcefully returning people to Eritrea. Conditions in detention are terrible, with detainees often subjected to beatings and other abuse and denied access to medical treatment or to the UNHCR. [29e] (p70)

"...in July 2008, Libya made plans to return 230 Eritreans, prompting Amnesty International to warn against their deportation. Amnesty reported that up to 700 Eritreans were being held in Misrata prison and were at risk of deportation. In late 2008 refugees who had spent time in Misrata before arriving in Italy told Human Rights Watch researchers of similar numbers of people in detention in Misrata in appalling conditions. They also said that Libya is holding hundreds of Eritrean and other asylum seekers in other locations for extended periods of time." [29e] (p70)

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ERITREAN REFUGEES IN ISRAEL

33.12 The Human Rights Watch 2009 "Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea" report added:

"Increasing numbers of Eritreans have arrived in Israel in recent years. Israel has provided many of the Eritrean asylum seekers who successfully entered the country with renewable work visas, but does not grant these individuals formal refugee status. Eritreans are also among the dozens of asylum-seekers who tried to enter Israel from Egypt but have been stopped, temporarily detained at the border, and then forcibly returned to Egypt by the Israeli Defence Forces. Israeli security forces returned hundreds to Egypt in such fashion during 2008 without assessing their claims for protection. Some of the Eritreans refused entry by Israel in 2008 were among those subsequently detained in the Sinai by Egyptian police and then forcibly deported to Eritrea." [29e] (p69)

33.13 An IRIN article of 27 February 2008 mentioned that the Israeli Government was rounding up over 240 African asylum-seekers, including and primarily Eritreans, with a view to conducting mass returns. UNHCR has recorded an influx of over 7,400 claimants over the past three years. [19b]

33.14 A Reuters report, dated 31 August 2008, stated that:

“Israel has forcibly returned to Egypt dozens of African migrants who had slipped into the Jewish state, and rights activists say they fear some are refugees who risk torture if Egypt sends them home as expected.

“Egyptian security sources said Israel had returned 48 migrants of Eritrean, Sudanese and Senegalese nationality to Egypt this month [August 2008], and that Cairo planned to deport them all.

“...activists say Eritreans had surpassed [the] Sudanese as the largest group of African migrants in Israel. Nearly all arrive via Egypt and include Pentecostal Christians fleeing religious persecution and others trying to avoid military service.

“...Egypt for years tolerated tens of thousands of African migrants on its territory, but its attitude soured in recent months after it came under pressure to halt a rising flow of Africans across the sensitive Sinai border with Israel.”
[76b]

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ERITREAN REFUGEES IN EGYPT

33.15 On 1 July 2008, a total of 740 Eritrean nationals (655 male and 85 female) were returned *en masse* from Egypt. Shabait, the Eritrean State news agency, stated that the returnees “expressed satisfaction with the warm hospitality accorded them.” [11c]. Awate, on 10 July 2008, expressed reservations on how the returnees will eventually be treated. [50ak]. A Reuters report, dated 8 January 2009, stated that Egypt deported a group of 32 Eritreans in January 2009, most of whom had tried to flee across the Egyptian desert to Israel. The Eritreans were flown back to their country's capital Asmara. [76c]

33.16 The Human Rights Watch 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report added:

“In June 2008 Egypt returned to Eritrea up to 1,200 Eritreans who had crossed into Egypt from Sudan. As of late 2008, at least 740 of those returnees were still imprisoned in Wi’a, the military detention facility in Eritrea. [29e] (p68)

“In December 2008 and January 2009 the Egyptian authorities deported dozens more Eritreans who had been detained in the Nakhl detention center in North Sinai and police stations in the nearby city of al-Arish. Around 100 of the Eritreans detained in Nakhl had earlier been returned to Egypt by Israel. While detained in Nakhl the Eritreans were visited and registered by officials from the Eritrean embassy, but UNHCR was denied access to the facility.”
[29e] (p68)

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ERITREAN REFUGEES IN ETHIOPIA

- 33.17 According to the Suwera Centre for Human Rights 2009 report, "The State of Human Rights in Eritrea 2008":

"The flow of Eritrean refugees to Ethiopia started at the end of the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 2000. The refugees were settled in the Shimelba camp in the Tigray region since 2004 when they were transferred from Wa'ala Nehbi camp due to its proximity to the Eritrean border. The Shimelba camp is located 33kms south of Sheraro town. Another camp has also been opened in Mai Ayni away from the Eritrean border as the first one was full to capacity. [22] (p27)

"The WFP estimated the number of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia by the end of 2008 to be around 32,000. 20,000 of those lived in the Shimelba camp." [22] (p27)

- 33.18 An article by Refugees International, dated 30 May 2008, gave an update of people of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia, stating:

"Sources suggest that many, perhaps most, Eritreans living in Ethiopia reacquired citizenship under a nationality proclamation enacted in 2003. But as one person related, 'People are still afraid to talk though their position has improved.' Some interviewees reported problems obtaining national identification cards, including 3-year delays and interrogation by immigration officials. RI observed national IDs showing 'previous nationality' as Eritrean. Eritreans with Ethiopian citizenship said they still feel compelled to conceal their background, even among close friends. They rarely congregate as a community, nor are they politically engaged. Some spoke of employment discrimination. An Ethiopian in a third country said, 'They made us feel nothing for that country. My kids in Eritrea are not in a good life. Those in Ethiopia are treated as foreigners. They get work permits but must not bring attention to themselves.' A woman in Addis Ababa said she is afraid to open a bank account because her family lost a lot of property during the conflict.

"Although the nationality proclamation states that 'no Ethiopian may be deprived of his nationality' unless he renounces his citizenship or acquires another nationality, interviewees were uncertain about their status in the event of renewed conflict. Similar ambiguity appears in the Directive to Determine the Residence Status of Eritrean Nationals Residing in Ethiopia, which states that a residence permit may be canceled 'where the bearer ...is found to be an undesirable foreigner.' In the event of renewed conflict, individuals of Eritrean origin are unsure of their fate. As one man from Asmara observed, 'the gap between law and implementation is like the space between the sun and the moon, and no one knows how to close it.'" [21b]

- 33.19 The Ethiopian Government has a policy of containing Eritrean refugees in camps near the border, the main camp being Shimelba Camp, which houses 18,000 refugees, is close to full capacity, and still receiving 600 refugees a month. (Refugees International, 30 May 2008). The Refugees International article of 30 May 2008 states that:

“The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its implementing partner, the Ethiopian Administration for Refugee/Returnee Affairs (ARRA), grapple with issues residents face, such as insufficient food rations, restricted mobility, presence of Eritrean opposition groups, and limited access to education and mental health services. About 75 percent of camp residents are young males, many university-educated, who fled conscription or political persecution, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is a widespread problem. Often arriving without Eritrean identity documents, women and children may be even more vulnerable when seeking reunification with a husband or father, only to find that individual has moved on. Others expressed concern about the small size and gender composition of police patrols.” [21b]

- 33.20 The US Committee Refugees International’s ‘World Refugee Survey 2008’ added further details about Shimelba camp and refugees from Eritrea in Ethiopia:

“Ethiopia also hosted some 23,900 Eritrean refugees. About 16,800 of them lived in Shimelba camp near the northern border: this group included some 4,000 ethnic Kunama, whom the Eritrean Government had accused of supporting Ethiopia in the 1998 to 2000 dispute; evangelical Christians fleeing religious persecution; and newer arrivals fleeing forced conscription. Most of the Kunama turned down the option of U.S. resettlement after guerrilla leaders who wanted to keep them in the camp showed them the movie *Roots* and violent American television police dramas and told them that Americans would steal their organs. Another 7,100 ethnic Afar Eritrean refugees lived in the remote Afar region of northern Ethiopia...between 300 and 600 ethnic Tigrinya Eritrean refugees entered per month as fear grew over the possibility of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea over their disputed border.” [51a]

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ERITREANS REFUGEES IN SUDAN

- 33.21 The Human Rights Watch 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report stated:

“Over the past five years the increasingly cordial relations between the Sudanese and Eritrean governments have resulted in increasing pressure from Sudanese authorities on Eritrean refugees to return to Eritrea, contrary to the longstanding Sudanese reception of Eritrean refugees over the previous decades. [29e] (p67)

“...currently most refugees who flee Eritrea to Sudan either settle in refugee camps in eastern Sudan or transit onward within the country or to other countries in search of a safer and more stable existence. Those not in camps in Sudan are extremely vulnerable to abuse, in particular extortion and forcible return by the Sudanese authorities - Sudanese security services have links to Eritrean security agents. [29e] (p67)

“...in Sudan, there are nearly 100,000 Eritreans living in open camps at Kassala, al-Gedaref, Gezira, and Sinar. About 30,000 are said to live in towns in these areas and at least another 30,000 or more are estimated to be living in Khartoum. At least 10,000 new arrivals arrived during 2007. According to a Sudanese official, 13,000 Eritreans arrived in Sudan in 2008. The government says it cannot cope and has asked the UN for help.” [29e] (p67)

- 33.22 An Awate article, dated 3 January 2008, provides details regarding what happens to Eritrean arrivals after being arrested by the Sudanese border patrols. The article stated:

“When they cross the border, they will be arrested by Sudanese border patrol and detained in the refugee camps which have hosted thousands of Eritreans since the 1960s. But before they arrive at the refugee camps, they will stop by at the detention centers. Here, they will be asked how much money they have, if they have a mobile phone or an address book that shows they have relatives abroad. They are dispossessed of their money and directed to call their family members abroad and ask them to send money. From the detention centers, they will be driven to Wed Sherifey refugee camp. There, the authorities will ask them to pay a fee (the equivalent of \$3 USD) to have their pictures taken. If they don't have the money, and most won't, they will be dumped in a shack at transit camp or deported back to Eritrea. If they do have the money to pay for the pictures, they are transported to Camp 26, where they will be asked to pay \$10 USD to receive a refugee ID card.” [50an]

- 33.23 The article continued, describing conditions in the transit camps and refugee camps as both overcrowded and poorly provisioned, with the added risk for females of sexual harassment by the Sudanese guards. It adds that Eritrean escapees are arrested if found in Kassala, as they move up to Khartoum or Port Sudan. The article also alleges that the Eritrean authorities are providing incentives for local East Sudan border officials to arrest and forcibly deport Eritrean escapees. [50an]

- 33.24 The US Committee Refugees International's 'World Refugee Survey 2008' added further details about refugees from Eritrea in Sudan:

"In May [2007], authorities deported six Eritrean asylum seekers from Kassala State. In mid-June [2007], following a court ruling, Sudan deported two Eritrean families seeking asylum, despite UNHCR's urging Sudan to process their applications for refugee status. In mid-July [2007], the Government was reportedly preparing to deport up to 500 refugees to Eritrea the following week, most of them UNHCR-registered residents of Wadi Sherife camp. Police arrested 25 Eritreans and Ethiopians and deported them before UNHCR had a chance to assess their status. In August [2007], Sudan deported 36 refugees back to Ethiopia. Despite reassuring UNHCR that it would not repeat the practice, the following month Sudan handed over at least 15 refugees to Ethiopian authorities at the Metema border crossing. In October [2007], the Government deported 11 Ethiopians allied to the Ethiopian opposition movement. Other deportations went unreported...there were no confirmed reports of attacks on refugees by foreign agents but an Eritrean opposition source alleged that Eritrean agents abducted Eritreans and took them to Eritrean prisons." [51b]

- 33.25 On 17 July 2007, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reported that local sources in Khartoum had noted that "the Sudanese authorities have been conducting daily house to house arrests of Eritreans since Thursday 12 July 2007" marking 500 Eritreans for deportation. [67b]. (Also in *Christian Today*, 18 July 2007. [52]. The sources claim that the majority detained have been granted refugee status by the local officers of the UNHCR. The article added:

"The harassment and 'disappearances' of key Eritrean refugees occurred periodically in the past. However, the recent mass roundups are the most visible sign to date of a continuing rapprochement between the governments of Eritrea and Sudan, which has seen the Sudanese government progressively clamping down on the activities of the Eritrean diaspora. Several observers feel this may be part of a strategy agreed upon during a visit to Sudan in June by high ranking Eritrean security officials with an unannounced agenda." [67b]

- 33.26 An Awate article, dated 7 December 2008, reported on an incident that took place in November 2008 involving Eritreans who had been placed in a detention centre in Sudan. The article stated:

"On Sunday, November 30, 2008, Eritrean soldiers shot at individuals attempting to escape a detention center, killing one and wounding two in the process.

"The three individuals were part of a group of seventeen refugees who had been forcefully returned by Sudan and handed to Eritrean security officials. The escape attempt occurred while the Eritrean authorities were in the process of transporting them from their detention center at Asebera.

"There are tens of other refugees awaiting deportation in Kassala prisons.

“Sudan, and specifically the regional government of Kassala, the Sudanese province bordering Eritrea, has been cooperating with the Eritrean government for more than two years now. It has been, to the detriment of Eritrean nationals, deporting escapees and facilitating intelligence activities by the Eritrean security inside Sudanese territories.” [50u]

See [Opposition in exile](#)

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ERITREAN REFUGEES IN KENYA

- 33.27 A Dehai article of 7 July 2008 stated that there is an Eritrean community in Kenya which includes people of Eritrean origin who have lost their Ethiopian nationality, and regard themselves as stateless; the case study quoted outlines the problems Eritreans face in terms of housing and employment in Kenya. [11d]

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ERITREAN REFUGEES IN ITALY

- 33.28 The Human Rights Watch report 2009 “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report stated:

“In 2008 a record number of 33,000 asylum seekers arrived in Italy, triple the number of arrivals in 2006. This is up from 20,000 in 2007 and 10,000 in 2006. Many of the new arrivals are from Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia...a large proportion of those coming to Italy, just under 20 percent, are from Eritrea. [29e] (p72)

“...in Italy, asylum seekers are registered with [the] UNHCR and the Italian authorities and are fed and housed in government reception centers or - due to the massive influx - temporarily in schools and churches while they await the determination of their status. While they await determination they receive food and shelter. Ninety-nine percent of all Eritreans are granted the right to remain and work in Italy. A small percentage of those - around two percent - are granted asylum under the 1951 refugee convention and are given refugee travel documents and can apply for visas to travel outside Italy. However the vast majority are granted ‘humanitarian’ or ‘subsidiary’ protection for a finite period of time, usually one year. The latter do not necessarily receive travel documents. [29e] (p73)

“Many Eritrean refugees in Italy complained to Human Rights Watch that once they receive their subsidiary protection documents, they are forced to leave the temporary reception centers and many become destitute. They told Human Rights Watch that they had no money, nowhere to go, and no means of getting any money in the difficult labor market.” [29e] (p73)

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34. EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

- 34.01 The US State Department Human Rights Report for 2008 stated basic information about employment in Eritrea:

“The law provides workers with the legal right to form and join unions to protect their interests; however, some government policies restricted free association or prevented the formation of some unions, including within the civil service, military, police, and other organizations providing essential services. All unions, including the Teacher's Union, Women's Union, Youth's Union, and Worker's Union, were run by the government. Membership in these unions was required. The government did not encourage the formation of independent unions by employees of private businesses. Union leaders were typically government employees, and union activities were generally government sanctioned. The Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare must grant special approval for groups of 20 or more persons seeking to form a union. There were no reports that the government opposed the formation of labor associations during the year; however, the government did not approve the formation of any unions.

“The law allows strikes; however, all unions were closely aligned with the government and thus did not exercise or promote the right to strike.

“The law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference, and collective bargaining is allowed. In practice all unions are subservient to the government, which sets wages for union workers, employees of PFDJ-owned enterprises, and government employees. Wages are set independently in the small private sector, although workers are not allowed to organize independently.

“Since most businesses were government-owned, unions did not experience antiunion discrimination.” [4] (section 6)

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FORCED OR COMPULSORY LABOUR

34.02 The US State Department Human Rights report for 2008 stated:

“The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, there were reports that some citizens between the ages of 18 and 54 performed compulsory labor during the year. Nearly all persons between the ages of 18 and 54 by law were subjected to national service; however, during the year many were demobilized after they completed their requirement, or were found medically unfit. The criteria for demobilization was unclear and allowed the government to arbitrarily recall citizens or deny them key rights as freedom of movement.” [4j] (section 6)

34.03 Certain aspects of national service involve compulsory labour, as noted in the Human Rights Watch 2009 report “Service for Life - State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea” report:

“In 2002, with the announcement of the Warsai Yekalo Development Campaign (WDYC), a national social and economic development effort, the statutory national service of 18 months was indefinitely extended so that all male and female adults must be available to work at the direction of the state in various capacities until the age of 40 - now often 50 or 55 in practice. Indefinite national service starts with six months of military training followed by 12 months’ deployment either in military service or working for some other government ministry at the direction of the Ministry of Defense. Some are also drafted to work for the companies owned and operated by the military or ruling party elites that dominate the economy.” [29e] (p3)

34.04 Regarding the distinction between national service and military service, the Human Rights Watch report quoted above explained that:

“Not all national service is military service, since many conscripts are not deployed in the army but on civilian development 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. [29e] (p43-44)

“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. One Eritrean academic notes that, ‘What people do not realise is that in Eritrea, there is no military service. There is only *Hagerawi Agelglot* (National Service) which is much more ambitious and broader than common Military Service.’ Military duties are only one of a number of different assignments that conscripts can be tasked with, although it is the most common.” [29e] (p44)

See [Military/National Service](#); [Trafficking](#)

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Annex A: Chronology of Major Events

- 1952** UN approves federation between Eritrea and Ethiopia; however, Ethiopian rule effectively stifles Eritrean autonomy. [1b] (p402)
- 1958** Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM) founded. [1b] (p402)
- 1961** Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), which had superseded ELM, begins armed campaign for Eritrean independence from Ethiopia. [1b] (p402)
- 1962** Eritrea's status reduced to that of an Ethiopian province. [1a]
- 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). [1b] (p402)
- 1974** Revolution which brings hard-line Marxist 'Derg' regime to power. [1b] (p402)
- 1977-78** Further splits within ELF. [1b] (p402)
- 1985** Second civil war between ELF and breakaway factions, leading to further splits from ELF, effectively neutralising it as an effective military force; EPLF now the main opposition force to Ethiopian rule. [1b] (p402)
- 1990** EPLF captures Massawa. [1b] (p402)
- 1991** **May:** EPLF captures Asmara; at 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. [1b] (p402, 426)
- 1993** **April:** UN-supervised referendum overwhelmingly approves independence from Ethiopia. [1b] (p403)
24 May: Independence proclaimed. [1b] (p403)
28 May: International recognition of independence of the State of Eritrea; EPLF establishes transitional government, with EPLF leader Issayas Afewerki becoming first President of Eritrea. [1b] (p403)
8 June: Issayas Afewerki elected first President of Eritrea by the National Assembly. [1b] (p403)
- 1994-95** Conferences on constitutional reform held throughout Eritrea, but Government opponents not invited to participate. [1b] (p403)
- 1994** **February:** EPLF becomes the People's Front for Democracy & Justice (PFDJ) and espouses its support for a pluralistic political system. [1b] (p403)
- 1995** **May:** Government rationalisation programme cuts size of civil service and reorganises administrative regions. [1b] (p403)
- 1997** **May:** New Constitution adopted by Constituent Assembly but not fully implemented. Government officials continue to insist that the Constitution would be implemented gradually. [1b] (p403)

- 1998** **May:** Border conflict with Ethiopia erupts into heavy fighting; thousands of Eritreans expelled from Ethiopia and many Ethiopians leave Eritrea. [1b] (p404)
- 1999** **February:** Upsurge in fighting with Ethiopia. [1b] (p404)
March: Ten opposition groups based in Sudan form Alliance of Eritrean National Forces (AENF), led by ELF-CC's Chairman. [1b] (p408)
- 2000** **May:** Ethiopia launches all-out attack on Eritrea, capturing territory taken by Eritrea in May 1998. [1b] (p404)
June: Eritrea and Ethiopia sign ceasefire agreement and agree to UN monitoring force along border. [1b] (p404)
October: Eritrean professionals and academics meet in Berlin, Germany, and write a letter to President Issayas Afewerki, since known as the 'Berlin Manifesto', about the 'political and economic challenges that confront us as a new nation'. [1b] (p405)
December: Eritrea and Ethiopia sign peace agreement in Algeria establishing commissions to mark border, exchange prisoners, return displaced people and hear compensation claims. [1b] (p404-05)
- 2001** **February:** Eritrea accepts United Nations plans for a temporary demilitarised zone along its border with neighbouring Ethiopia. [1b] (History)
22 February: Ethiopia says it has completed its troop withdrawal from Eritrea in accordance with a United Nations-sponsored agreement to end the border war. [1a]
April: Eritrea 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. [1b] (History)
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') [1b] (p405)
July: Semere Kesete, the student union president at the University of Asmara, makes a speech at the graduation ceremony criticising the Government. He was arrested shortly afterwards. [1b] (p406)
August: Hundreds of students protest about Kesete's arrest; police arrest 400 of them, two of whom die during hard labour in detention. [1b] (p406)
September: The Government closes all privately owned newspapers. Following this the police arrest ten leading journalists. [5c] (p6)
18 September: Security authorities detain 11 members of the G11/G15 group. Four members escape arrest. [1b] (p406)
- 2002** **February:** It was decided that the National Assembly would comprise 75 members of the PFDJ Central Committee and 75 directly elected members. All but eight of the 50-member Constitutional Commission were government appointees, and there was no provision for any opposition participation in the interim system. [1b] (p403)
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. [5c] (p7)
13 April: The International Tribunal announces the border decision. Both Eritrea and Ethiopia declare victory. Confusion over which country controls Badme remains. [1b] (p405)
May: Roma Gebremichael, the wife of one of the G-15 detainees, is arrested. [5c] (p7)

May: The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announces that by the end of the year Eritreans in Sudan would no longer automatically be entitled to refugee status.

August: Semere Kesete escapes prison and flees to Ethiopia. [8f]

October: Malta deports over 200 asylum seekers back to Eritrea. They are detained on arrival and held incommunicado without charge or further explanation. [5c] (p5)

29 November: 1,130 POWs and 95 civilian internees of Eritrean origin are released by the Ethiopian authorities and repatriated. [1b] (p405)

2003 **March:** The Boundary Commission categorically rules Badme to be in Eritrean territory. Ethiopia voices its opposition to the ruling. [1b] (p405)

2004 **February:** Former Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy is named UN special envoy to help defuse the stand-off between Ethiopia and Eritrea. [1b] (p405)

July: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan visited the Horn of Africa in a new initiative to kick-start the stalled Ethiopian-Eritrean peace process. [19a]

September: UNMEE expresses disappointment after the Eritrean Government re-imposed restrictions of movement along a crucial supply route for its peacekeepers. [19a]

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”. [19a]

December: Eritrea calls on Ethiopia to abide by the ruling of an independent commission that delineated their disputed border in 2002 and urges the international community to help secure peace and stability in the Horn of Africa. It demands Ethiopia’s “cooperation with the Boundary Commission to ensure expeditious demarcation of the boundary” and calls for “full and unconditional respect of the Algiers Agreement”. [19a]

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. [8h]

July: UNMEE expresses concern over ‘continuing incidents of violence’ along the disputed 1,000 km border between the neighbouring countries. [19d]

August: Martti Ahtisaari, 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. [19d]

October: The Government imposes more restrictions on the movement of UN peacekeepers, days after grounding UN helicopter flights. [19d]

December: The Eritrean Government rejects a claim by Amnesty International that it engages in religious persecution. The UN relocates some UNMEE staff to Ethiopia following Eritrea’s decision to expel European and North American personnel. [19d]

- 2006** **20 January:** The patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church placed under arrest. [31a]
24 February: The Eritrea Government launched a recall of demobilised troops, along with launching a number of national service round-ups. [50j]
1 June: Travel restrictions into and within the country enforced by the Eritrean Government for foreign nationals and dual nationality holders. [4c]
16 October: The Eritrean army moves 1,500 troops and 14 tanks into the demilitarised zone of the Ethiopian/Eritrean border. The UN Security Council protests at the “flagrant” breach of the ceasefire. [8g]
3 November: Helen Berhane, a Rhema church member who had been detained without trial for 18 months, who was abused and tortured, was confirmed as having been released from detention. [5o] [31h] [67c]
6 December: *Giffa* begins in Asmara; 500 parents and relatives of young people missing from official registers targeted for arrest, detention and fines. [5e]
- 2007** **25 January:** Further Government restrictions and impositions placed on the deposed patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. [49]
5 April: The Government bans the practice of FGM. [19c]
9 May: 80 members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, a registered denomination, arrested in Asmara. [87b]
8 June: Police raids in Asmara, detaining Pente Christians. [67a]
4 July: The 21st round of National Service conscripts called up. [50aa]
15 October: Attempted assassination of Col. Simon Ghebredengel. [50af]
November: Eritrea accepts border line demarcated by international boundary commission. Ethiopia rejects it. [8j]
- 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. [8j]
15/16 February: UNMEE withdraws its force of 1,400 troops and 200 military observers as a “temporary withdrawal”, with the Ethiopian Government permitting withdrawal to northern Ethiopia. [66c]. However, a dispute arose between the UN and the Eritrean Government about how much equipment the UN could leave, with the UN insisting on leaving with all its transport: the Eritrean Government prevented both fuel and food rations reaching the UN force. [8o]
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. [8j]
May: Eritrea calls on UN to terminate peacekeeping mission. [8j]
June: Fighting breaks out between Eritrean and Djiboutian troops in the disputed Ras Doumeira border area. [8j]
September: An Eritrean government intelligence camp in Molokhseito was reportedly attacked by armed units of the Eritrean National Salvation Front (ENSF) [50z]
November: The Eritrean government launched a fresh crackdown on 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. [91]

- 2009** **January:** The UN Security Council gave Eritrea an ultimatum to withdraw its forces from a disputed border region with Djibouti within five weeks. The UN resolution also called for Eritrea to remove its military hardware from the Ras Doumeira region and the island of Doumeira. [8b]
- 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”. [55]
- 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. [8j]
- June:** United Nations IRIN reported that Eritrea was facing a food crisis caused by poor harvests, a lack of rain, and the high cost of food. [19c]
- 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. [8c]. An assassination attempt on President Afewerki by members of the Eritrean Defence Forces reportedly fails. The president is reportedly unharmed in the incident. [94b]

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Annex B: Political Organisations

Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front (ARDUF)

The ARDUF is known locally as Ouguguma, which is a newly created Afar word for revolution. [70b]

Afar National Liberation Movement (ANLM)

The ANLM is a pro-Ethiopian Afar-based organisation. [70b]

Alkhalas

Website given in an Awate article of 15 February 2007 as <http://www.alkhalas.org/eng-home1.htm> [50t]

Association of Eritrean Initiative (AEI)

The AEI is also known as the Eritrean Initiative Group (EIG) and is led by Mhamed Medeni. It is a member of the AENF/EDA. Its popular support inside Eritrea is very limited. [70b]

Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP)

The website of the EDP was given in an Awate article of 15 February 2007 as: <http://www.selfi-democracy.com> [50t]

Eritrean Islamic Jihad (EIJ)

Radical opposition group; in August 1993 split into a military wing and political wing. [1a]

Eritrean Islamic Salvation Movement (EISM)

Known until 1998 as Eritrean Islamic Jihad (EIJ), the EISM is led by Sheikh Khalil Mohammed Amer. The EIJ was allied to Sudan and had bases in that country. It is a member of the AENF/EDA and has Muslim support. [70b]

Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrea (DMLE)

An organisation opposed to the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) Leadership Hamid Turkey. [70b]

Eritrean Democratic Resistance Movement (EDRM)

Led by Ismail Nada, the EDRM is based on the Nara and other ethnic minorities from the Gash-Setit zone. It is a member of the AENF/EDA. It is narrowly ethnic in make-up. [70b]

Eritrean Kunama Democratic Liberation Movement (EKDLM)

Led by Qernelyos, the EKDLM, which is based on the Kunama ethnic group, is allegedly supported by Ethiopia. It is a member of the AENF/EDA. [70b]

Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF)

Mainly Muslim and formed in the late 1950s to pursue Eritrean autonomy. It initiated anti-Ethiopian guerilla activity in the early 1960s, but its influence later declined as it was increasingly marginalised by the breakaway Eritrean People's Liberation Front (which later became the People's Front for Democracy and Justice). Now split into numerous factions, the ELF opposed the PDFJ transitional government of Eritrea. Website given in an Awate article of 15 February 2007 as <http://www.omaal.net> [50t]

Eritrean Liberation Front-Central Command (ELF-CC)

Founded 1982; Chairman Abdella Idriss. [1b] (p419)

Eritrean Liberation Front-National Council (ELF-NC)

Leader Hassan Ali Assad. [1b] (p419)

Eritrean Liberation Front-Revolutionary Council (ELF-RC)

Established by former ELF members who remained outside EPLF; President Seyoum Ogbamichael; leader Ahmed Mohamed Nasser. [1b] (p419). Awate reported that Ogbamichael died on 16 December 2005. [50ao]

Eritrean National Alliance (ENA)

Formerly **Alliance of Eritrean National Forces (AENF)** and founded in 1999. Changed name in 2002 – Grouping of 13 opposition organisations (including EIJ, EIS, ELF, and a number of ELF factions). Military wing set up in 2003; Chairman Hiruy Tedla Bairu; Secretary General Husayn Khalifa. [1b] (p419)

Eritrean People's Congress (EPC)

Led by Abu Siehel, the EPC is allegedly backed by Sudan. It is a member of the AENF/EDA with limited support from Muslim Eritreans. [70b]

Eritrean People's Liberation Front Democratic Party (EPLF-DP)

The first opposition organisation to be created from the membership of the PFDJ that now rules Eritrea. Established at the end of 2001 with a statement on the Internet, the EPLF/DP aims to protest at President Afewerki's authoritarian rule. It is believed that one of its founding members is the former Defence Minister, Mesfin Hagos. [1b] (p419)

Eritrean Revolutionary Democratic Front (ERDF)

Led by Berhane Yemane, the ERDF, which is a member of the AENF/EDA, was close to Sagem and consequently friendly with Ethiopia. [70b]

Islah

Website given in an Awate article of 15 February 2007 as <http://www.islaher.org> [50t]

Islamic Salvation Movement

Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement (EIJM), Harakat al Jihad al Islami' – The Federation of American Scientists (statement last updated 1999) said: "The Eritrean opposition group Harakat al Jihad al Islami (EIJM) changed its name to Harakat al Khalas al Islami (Islamic Salvation Movement) in September 1998. The Movement has been seeking the forceful overthrow of Eritrea's government and its replacement by an Islamic government. Sudanese authorities indicated their support of the Movement allowing the Movement's Secretary-General Sheikh Mohamed Amer to hold a news conference in Khartoum." [24]

People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ)

Founded 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; Chair Isaias Afewerki, President of Eritrea; Secretary General Alamin Mohamed Said. [1b] (p419)

Popular Liberation Forces

Breakaway faction from ELF which went on to form EPLF in 1977. [1b] (p402)

Red Sea Afar Democratic Organisation

Afar opposition group; Secretary General Amin Ahmmad. [1b] (p419)

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Annex C: Prominent people: past and present

THE GOVERNMENT

Isaias Afewerki

President Isaias Afewerki is the dominant figure in Eritrean politics: head of state, government and ruling party. He was born in 1945 and joined the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1966 after studying engineering at Addis Ababa University. He underwent military training in China and quickly rose up the ELF chain of command. He helped found the Eritrean People's Liberation Forces in 1970, which became the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) at the 1st organisational congress of 1977 and became Secretary-General of the front in 1987. At independence he became chairman of the State Council of the National Assembly and later secretary general of the Provisional Government of Eritrea. Isaias has presided over the country since assuming power on the fall of the Dergue in May 1991 and was elected president by the National Assembly in June 1993. During 1997 and 1998, however, critics accused him of pursuing an overly aggressive foreign policy towards neighbours and of blocking the planned transition to democracy. Post-war, there appears to be no chance of Eritrea's government regaining this momentum under Isaias' authoritarian rule. Since late 2002, he has also assumed responsibility for most of the defence portfolio. [70b] (Jane's Security Sentinel, October 2007)

Arefaine Berhe

Minister of Agriculture [70b]

Abraha Asfaha

Minister of Construction [70b]

Sebhat Ephrem

Minister of Defence [70b]

Semere Rusom

Minister of Education [70b]

Tesfai Gebreselassie

Minister of Energy and Mines [70b]

Berhane Abrehe

Minister of Finance [70b]

Osman Salih Muhammad

Minister of Foreign Affairs [1a]

Dr Salih Mekki

Minister of Health [1a]

Ali Abdu

Minister of Information [1a]

Fawzia Hashim

Minister of Justice [1a]

Askalu Menkerios

Minister of Labour and Human Welfare [70b]

Woldemichael Gebremariam

Minister of Land, Water and Environment [1a]

Ahmed Haj Ali

Minister of Maritime Resources [1a]

Naizghi Kiflu

Minister of Local Government [1a]

Dr Giorgis Teklemikael

Minister of Trade and Industry [1a]

Amna Nur Hussein

Minister of Tourism [1a]

THE G15/G11 POLITICAL PRISONERS**Ogbe Abraha**

Army General; formerly Chief of Staff of the Defence Force, Minister of Trade and Industry, and Minister of Labour and Social Welfare; he has chronic asthma. [5d] (p6)

Aster Fissehatsion

Director in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; executive member of the official National Union of Eritrean Women; EPLF official since 1977; former wife of Mahmoud Ahmed Sheriffo, also detained in September 2001; she has stomach ulcers. [5d] (p6)

Berhane Gebregziabeher

Army Major-General; head of the National Reserve Force; EPLF political bureau member since 1977. [5d] (p6)

Beraki Gebreselassie

Former Ambassador to Germany (to May 2001); previously Minister of Education and Minister of Information and Culture. [5d] (p6)

Hamad Hamid Hamad

Head of the Arabic (Middle East) Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; former Ambassador to Sudan. [5d] (p6)

Saleh Kekiya

Former Minister of Transport and Communication, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs and Head of the Office of the President. [5d] (p6)

Germano Nati

Regional Administrator. [5d] (p6)

Estifanos Seyoum

Army Brigadier General; former Head of the Inland Revenue Service (to August 2001). [5d] (p6)

Mahmoud Ahmed Sheriffo

Former Vice-President (dismissed in February 2001), Minister of Local Government, and Minister of Foreign Affairs; EPLF co-founder. [5d] (p6)

Petros Solomon

Former Minister of Maritime Resources; previously Minister of Foreign Affairs, EPLF military commander and intelligence chief, EPLF political bureau member since 1977. [5d] (p6)

Haile Woldetensae (or Weldensae, also known as “Durue”)

Former Minister of Trade and Industry (until July 2001); previously Minister of Foreign Affairs during the war and the peace talks, and also Minister of Finance; former EPLF head of political affairs and political bureau member since 1977; he is diabetic.” [5d] (p6)

IMPRISONED JOURNALISTS

Compiled from the Committee to Protect Journalists’ list [30]

Zemenfes Haile**Ghebrehiwet Keleta****Selamyinghes Beyene****Hamid Mohammed Said****Saleh Ajezeeri Said Abdulkadir****Yosuf Mohamed Ali****Amanuel Asrat****Temesgen Gebreysus****Mattewos Habteab****Dawit Habtemichael****Medhanie Haile****Dawit Isaac****Seyoum Tsehaye**

Fessaye Yohannes (“Joshua”) AI reported on 15 February 2007 that he had died in prison. [5p]. RWB’s 2008 World Report also stated that he had died in prison. [17b].

See [Freedom of Speech and Media](#)

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Annex D: List of abbreviations

AI	Amnesty International
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
EU	European Union
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK government department)
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
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
MSF	Médecins sans Frontières
NA	Northern Alliance
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
ODPR	Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RSF	Reporteurs sans Frontières
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
STC	Save The Children
TB	Tuberculosis
TI	Transparency International
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGASS	United Nations General Assembly Special Session
UNHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMEE	United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSD	United States State Department
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

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Annex E: List of Eritrean public holidays in 2009

Below are listed the Eritrean public holidays for 2009:

1 January - New Year's Day

6 January - Orthodox Epiphany

10 February - Fenkil Day

8 March - Women's Day

9 March - Birth of the Prophet (Muhammed)

20 April - Orthodox Easter Monday

1 May - May Day

24 May - Independence Day

20 June - Martyrs' Day

1 September - Anniversary of the Start of the Armed Struggles

21 September - Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan)

28 November - Eid ul-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice)

25 December - Christmas Day [57]

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Numbering of source documents is not always consecutive because some older sources have been removed in the course of updating this document.

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