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## Appeal for Solidarity

### Hundreds of Eritrean Students Flee from the Military Service to the Sudan

11/5/2005

**SUWERA Centre for Human Rights (SCHR) expresses its rave concern about the rights and conditions of high schools students in Eritrea. SCHR has observed that** during the period from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2005, 448 Eritrean students arrived at the Sudanese borders. The students' ages range between 16 to 25 years, and 19 of them are females. The students are supposed to sit for university's entrance exams in next June, but they escaped from the military educational system that is imposed on them by the Eritrean government. In fact, the Eritrean government forces students to spend the last year of their high school in military training camp in Sawa, west Eritrea.

It is reported that classes at the camp are run by army officers who subject students to military rules. The military training is imposed during the educational classes and the students who disobey orders, inside or outside classes, are punished by standing under the sun for long hours or by creeping on sands under high temperature during the day.

Students confirm that the camp is not prepared for educational activities. The electricity is supplied for limited hours and students use candles' light for studying. Furthermore, sleeping rooms are unhealthy as each 15 students are accommodated in a 16 meter square room. Moreover, teaching in classes is delivered by older students under the national military service who are not qualified professionally for teaching. Those teachers are not trained for teaching and they are not qualified psychologically for the job because of spending more than the legally provided period in military.

Interviewing students, we noted that diseases, such as malaria, meningitis and psychological disorder are widely spread among the students in the military camp. The camp's hospital is open for limited hours per day and doctors are from the national military service. The



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military supervisors, not the doctors, decide sending the patients to the hospital or not. As a result, a number of deaths occurred in the camp because of lack of health care and malnutrition. The students are fed bread and tea for breakfast, lentil for lunch and dinner, and rarely meals include protein. Accordingly, the students are forced to sit for exams in a harsh educational environment and away of their families.

**SCHR believes that** the escape of such a big number of students who constitute 20% of the total number of students who will sit for this year's exam reflects the terrible situation of the students in the last year of high schools. This situation represents a hard experience for the entire educational process in Eritrea. While sitting for university's entrance exams requires good educational and psychological conditions, the Eritrean students find themselves in cruel situations. These situations forced the students to escape from the country on foot preferring unknown future than brutal present imposed by the Eritrean government.

SCHR hereby, demand that the Eritrean government to stop militarization of education in the country and allow the students in last year of high schools to sit for exams in their normal schools amongst their families.

We appeal to the international human rights organizations and individuals who are concerned about human rights to express their solidarity with the Eritrean students through calling the Eritrean government to abolish sitting for exams from the military camps.

SWERA Center for Human Rights appeals to the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees to consider the situations of the fleeing students who need the assistance of the Commission as well as to consider the situations of the other Eritreans who escaped from the human rights violations of the Eritrean government.

**SUWERA Centre for Human Rights**

# Suwera Center for Human Rights



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