

Africa is Silent

Eritrea's rulers continue to defy the conclusions and recommendations made by the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)

Eritrea's disturbing human rights situation

Living under arbitrary military rule –

where the only ruling party exercises absolute control over the lives of every citizen; a highly systematic repressive machinations are at play with every right being violated or restricted; a National Constitution remained shelved for over 10 years; a highly militarized society with more than 13% of the population being conscripted in the army; virtually the economy is in shambles with increasingly high rates of inflation.



No freedom of expression -

Aster Fissehatsion is a former director of the ministry of labor and social affairs in Eritrea. She has been imprisoned without charge or trial since September 2001, and her precise whereabouts are still

unknown. She and ten other high-ranking political officials who were arrested at the same time as her are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression.



Torture – young military conscripts accused of a military offence such as desertion, attempted desertion or being absent without permission are arbitrarily imprisoned or punished with torture, or possibly executed in the most serious cases. Suspected government opponents and alleged supporters of exile opposition groups are tortured in security or military custody. Religious prisoners are being tortured to force them to abandon their faith. Methods include being tied in painful positions for hours or days, particularly that known as "helicopter", and beatings.

No free press – The private media was shut down in 2001. Independent journalist, Seyoum Tsehaye, the 2007 winner of the Foundation de France press freedom prize, is being held in a secret prison camp since 2001. With him ten journalists working in the private media arrested and still remained incarcerated without charge or trial. Their whereabouts is not known. No media advocacy groups and human rights defenders are allowed to operate in the country.



Sever curtailment of religious rights –

Minority faiths, including Jehovah Witness and the evangelical church, remain banned, their place of worship shut down, any religious gathering prohibited, and their members continue to face arrest for worshipping at their homes and at weddings. Patriarch Antonios, Head of Eritrean Orthodox Church, stripped off his powers and remained under house arrest for the last three years.

Increasingly refugee producing country –

more than 25000 refugees remain in a refugee camp found in northern Ethiopia and a similar or more numbers in Sudan. Many continue to flee the county in defiance of the shoot-to-kill government policy.



Poster prepared by Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights in cognizance of the 43rd Regular Session of the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights

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**LETTER OF APPEAL ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN ERITREA
DISPATCHED TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE 43RD ORDINARY SESSION OF THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON
HUMAN AND PEOPLE'S RIGHTS**

May 2008, Ezulwini, Swaziland

Participants of the NGOs' forum – 43rd Ordinary Session - Representatives of the NGO community, individual human rights activist, members of the Press ...

The Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights (EMDHR) – a civic society organization of Eritrean exiled youths and students, duly formed and established in Pretoria, Republic of South Africa, commends the invaluable contribution the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the NGO community with observer status before the Commission have made and continue to offer to the betterment of human rights in Africa. Fully realizing the potentials and strengths of the NGO community attending this 43rd Session, EMDHR is honored to seize this opportunity to call the attention of all participants in this forum to the worrying human rights situation prevalent in Eritrea.

Eritrea, now the worst place in Africa in terms of lack of democracy and rampant human rights abuses, has not attracted the attention it deserves. The repressive governance that controls every walk of life in complete defiance to rule of law is the root cause. Eritrea is thus unique with no working constitution, no private press, no associations - not even a bar association or students' unions within school compounds, no political parties and organizations, with every right remains severely violated or restricted. Eritrea also rates high when it comes to all the negative indicators – maintaining huge army as big as 13% of its total population with harsh policy of militarized life which includes militarized colleges whereas the only university has remained closed; detaining large number of journalists, parliamentarians, thousands of believers; generating huge number of refugees disproportionate to its total population and failing economy with tripling inflation rates. This is reflected in the annual reports of avowed institutions including the Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders and Human Rights Watch. Indeed, the human rights situation in Eritrea is disturbing that it calls for immediate attention.

The honorable Commission and many of the NGOs attending this session know for fact that Eritrea has never submitted a report since it ratified the Charter in 1999; has been found in violation of various right of victims (two dozen of parliamentarians and journalists) who have remained in detention incommunicado for years in flagrant defiance to the conclusions and recommendation of the Commission. EMDHR therefore calls upon all the participants to:-

1. Direct their attention towards improving the bad human rights situation in Eritrea and in particular bring the situation before regional and international human rights forums; and
2. Play a leading role in lobbying and pressurizing the Government of Eritrean to address to the roots causes of the appalling situation.

Please kindly take note that, as an organization with first hand knowledge of the situation, EMDHR is always read to offer assistance and work in partnership with the community of NGO with an observer status before the African Commission.

Sincerely,

Samuel Bizen
EMDHR: Chairperson

Death while in Prison: An Eritrean political figure, Mr. Taha Mohammed Nur, faced death in prison on Feb 2008. He was the co-founder of Eritrean Liberation Front in 1950's. He was arrested in late 2005 without any charge placed against him. Many detained political leaders, journalists and members of the army are reportedly dead while in prison. But there is no any other means to confirm their death. Their families remained denied of their rights to know the whereabouts their beloved ones.

