



GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE

## UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

### Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on Eritrea

#HRC58 • 27 February 2025



#### OPENING STATEMENT

**Ms. Ilze BRANDS KEHRIS, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**

**Ms. Ilze BRANDS KEHRIS** provides an update to the UNHRC on the human rights situation in Eritrea since the enhanced interactive dialogue in 2024. According to the Government, steps have been taken towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, namely in the areas of education and health.

In 2024, the Government of Eritrea, in partnership with the UN system, reportedly provided **essential health services** to more than one million newborns, children and women. Eritrea reports 95% immunisation coverage among children. The authorities also report that there were 2,351 schools in 2023, up from 1,930 in 2015. Enrolments at the primary, middle and secondary levels have also reportedly increased. Gender parity is reported to have been attained at primary level and efforts are being made to **increase girls' participation** at higher levels. Eritrea further reported that it had conducted a mapping study of girls who had undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) in 2024 on 1,086 villages, which revealed that only 2.3% under the age of 5 and 4.4% of girls under 15 had undergone FGM. Currently, 12 of Eritrea's 67 subzones are **FGM-free**, according to the government. Eritrea also ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in December 2024.



Ms. Ilze BRANDS KEHRIS recognises the good work being accomplished by the UN country team in support of the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals for all Eritreans. OHCHR teams in Nairobi and Addis Ababa are ready to support Eritrea to implement the commitments undertaken last year during its UPR, including those on peace, justice and on supporting stronger institutions. But despite these reported improvements, serious concerns remain.

Eritrea continues to subject citizens to indefinite military service, contrary to international human rights norms and to calls from the UNHRC and other human rights mechanisms. Within the context of the system of **indefinite forced conscription**, other grave human rights violations are also of concern, including torture, sexual and gender-based violence and abusive labour practises. The system further compels many young people to flee the country on perilous journeys, exposing them to high risks of sexual violence, trafficking and other forms of human rights violations. Eritrea has so far not heeded the UNHRC's call to limit the national service to the statutory period of 18 months.

In addition, no steps have been taken to stop the inhumane practise of punishing family members for the actions of **draft deserters**. More broadly, OHCHR continues to receive credible reports of torture, arbitrary detention, inhumane detention conditions, enforced disappearances and restrictions on the rights of freedom of expression, of association and of peaceful assembly. Many politicians, journalists, religious believers and draft deserters are held in incommunicado detention. **Detention without trial** remains the norm in the country. Eritrea has so far not undertaken any credible steps to reform its legal and justice systems in line with international standards.

Neither have we seen any evidence of political will to tackle impunity for past human rights violations, including those documented by the Commission of Enquiry in 2014 and 2016, nor the more recent ones by the joint OHCHR-Ethiopia Human Rights Commission Investigation Team in 2023 for serious human rights violations committed by the Eritrean defence forces in the context of the **Tigray conflict**. This **impunity continues to embolden perpetrators** of human rights violations. In the current context, there is no likely prospect that the domestic judicial system will hold perpetrators accountable for the violations committed in the context of the Tigray conflict and in other cases. Moreover, the Eritrean defence forces are in violation of the cessation of hostilities agreement signed in November 2022 that called for the withdrawal of international forces from Ethiopian territory. OHCHR has credible information that Eritrean defence forces remain in Tigray and are committing violations, including abductions, rape, property looting and arbitrary arrests. OHCHR calls for the **immediate withdrawal of Eritrean defence forces** from Tigray.

Against this backdrop, Eritrea's **engagement with human rights mechanisms** is all the more important. Eritrea was reviewed by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child earlier this year, which noted some progress as well as challenges in several areas, including freedom of expression, religion and corporal punishment. OHCHR calls on Eritrea to extend full cooperation to international human rights mechanisms, including the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea and the relevant thematic special procedures mandate holders, namely those who have requested a visit, including the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Special Rapporteur on Torture and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association. OHCHR also calls on Eritrea to **submit overdue reports** to the



Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee Against Torture.

OHCHR stands ready to work with Eritrea to implement in good faith its commitment to strengthen its engagement with the Office of the High Commissioner. This includes work on the five areas indicated below identified jointly following OHCHR's most recent technical visit in May 2022.

- Enhancing rights as part of a transformative justice system.
- Harmonizing indigenous or traditional laws in line with international and regional human rights norms.
- Supporting a regional conference on traditional justice.
- Enhancing the rights and protection of persons with disabilities.
- Providing capacity-building on effective engagement with UN human rights mechanisms.

### STATEMENTS BY PANELLISTS

#### Mr. Mohamed Abdelsalam BABIKER, Special Rapporteur (SR) for the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea

The SR recognise Eritrea's increased engagement with some universal human rights mechanisms over the past year, including its participation in its fourth UPR and its review by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. He also welcomes Eritrea's ratification of the CRPD. The SR is encouraged by these developments and hopes they reflect Eritrea's willingness not only to engage at the international level, but also to take action to improve the situation on the ground by implementing the recommendations of various human rights mechanisms. At the same time, the SR regrets Eritrea continues to ignore his request to meet with the Government representatives to visit the country. He reiterates his willingness to engage with Eritrean authorities in a constructive spirit.

The reality is that Eritrea continues to face a **grave and long-standing human rights crisis**, characterised by the repression of fundamental rights, impunity and complete lack of access to justice for victims, though widespread and systematic. Suppression of freedoms of association, assembly, expression and opinion over the last three decades has created a climate of fear. As a result, there are **no independent media outlets**, civil society organisations or political parties in Eritrea. **Freedom of religion or belief** is repressed with periodic waves of mass arrests and efforts to control all aspects of religious life and institutions.

The situation of Eritrean victims of enforced disappearance remains extremely concerning. Hundreds of families of **disappeared Eritreans** live with agony of uncertainty. This is the plight of dozens of Eritrean Muslim leaders and teachers, disappeared since the 90s. Religious figures, political dissidents, journalists Seyoum Tsehaye and Dawit Isaac, the situation is ongoing in some cases for over 30 years. Their families have the right to truth. The SR strongly urge the government of Eritrea to provide them with information on the state of health and location of their loved ones. In the cases where disappeared persons are still alive, he calls on the authorities to promptly release them and in the case of deceased persons to finally deliver their remains to the families.



30 years on from the first round of the National Service Programme, the authorities continue to ignore calls for reform. In practise, this Programme keeps Eritreans in a **system of forced labour for years**. Citizens are forced to take part through detention, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment and the punishment of their families. In fact, the National Service has impacted all aspects of life in Eritrea, from its economic structure or the ability of Eritreans to choose their profession or have dignified work, to the high rates of desertion at the high school level, to the right to family life, with Eritrean children growing up with absent fathers and mothers forced to take the load of sustaining the family on their own. It also continues to push thousands of Eritreans to seek asylum abroad.

Now more than ever, it is crucial to protect the integrity and legitimacy of the UNHRC and the universal human rights mechanisms. Now more than ever, the SR feels compelled to stress the importance of going beyond political slogans, broad statements and reporting requirements and calls on Eritrea to take concrete and specific measures to implement the recommendations of human rights mechanisms. Without implementation, without engagement by the concerned states and without sustained pressure by Member States to ensure accountability and action on human rights issues, reports will remain little more than **empty and shallow words**. Reviews by these mechanisms will become like boxed technique exercises. This is how people lose face in the human rights architecture.

It is up to Member States to **uphold the promise of human rights** and preserve the integrity of the UNHRC. The SR calls on Member States to apply the principles of impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity so often invoked within the UNHRC and critically assess the factual evidence presented before it brought over the years by his mandate, his predecessors, the Commission of Enquiry on Eritrea and dozens of international and diaspora human rights organisations, investigative journalists and by thousands of Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers spread across the globe who were forced to flee the country they love.

**H.E. Mr. Habtom ZERAİ, Chargé d'affaires at the Permanent Mission of Eritrea to the United Nations Office at Geneva**

Representing the delegation of Eritrea to the UN Geneva, H.E. Mr. Habtom ZERAİ explains that every year, this enhanced interactive dialogue unfolds like a well-rehearsed seasonal show with the cast stepping onto the stage, each in their assigned role. This script plays out almost identically to previous years as the dialogue begins. The show has crawled around 420 years from the central premise of holding a sovereign State accountable, but much like a worn-out drama, the plot twists and turns, but ultimately it circles back to familiar **tactics of naming and shaming**. As the drama persists, one thing becomes painfully clear, the glaring hypocrisy and bias in the UNHRC's application of country-specific mandates. Suddenly, the theme still drives on, teasing the possibility of something meaningful without ever delivering.

At its very core, this show stumbles around a film in the central premise that goes to hold a foundation of 3.5 million to the whims of unaccredited, self-styled human rights crusaders, devious civil society organisations. In this absurd exercise, a nation forged in sacrifice and tempered by its resilience is cast as a liar. When in fact Eritrea's fight for independence was a struggle for human rights and justice, a struggle against oppression, a struggle against exploitation and systemic violations, ample evidence reveals Eritrea's long history of severe





injustice and human suffering under colonial rule. Tragically, even today, **Eritrea faces ongoing deliberate brutalisation** through political and diplomatic sabotage, human rights trafficking, illegal unilateral sanctions, and other unjust and immoral measures.

Despite this, Eritrea for years has openly engaged with credible UN agencies. That goodwill is smothered by this theatrical charm trance, where our reality, our strides in literacy, healthcare, and infrastructure, despite sanctions and encirclement, is drawn by biased and rhetorical narratives. This deliberate misinformation is not only unjust but also profoundly irate. A simple yet undeniable reality further underscores the absurdity of this spectacle. While this platform is repeatedly used to present exaggerated and misleading portrayals of Eritrea, a **fully operational UN Country Office** continues to function in Asmara, where your colleagues constructively engage on a daily basis with Eritrea's Government, executing tangible development initiatives. Yet, the reports suggested or presented today, like those before them, persist in disregarding the more accurate and nuanced pictures of the country's progress and challenges, as reported by the UN Country Office.

Interjections come from Eritrea's detractors, often circulating back to the same pointless and hollow allegations raised against Eritrea in the past. What is meant to be a compelling debate has become a theatrical exercise in futility, a pantomime where the only suspense lies in where everyone will tune in next year. Nonetheless, Eritrea stands apart, not as a player in this past, but as a nation above it, armoured by colonial egos, unshaken by hollow critics, and unmoved by the clutter of an empty stage. Its script is written in the resilience of our people, not by the whims of specific mandates.

#### **Mr. Yohannes GHEBREHIWET, Civil Society Representative**

Mr. Yohannes GHEBREHIWET is honoured to speak on behalf of all religious persecuted in Eritrea in this esteemed forum. In Eritrea, **freedom of religion or belief has been restricted** and controlled in many ways. Since 1993, the Eritrean Government has denied citizenship to Jehovah's Witnesses for failing to participate in the independence referendum on religious grounds. It continues to harass them without due process. Since 2002, the Government refuses to recognise the Evangelical Churches. His brothers and sisters in Christ from those Churches are prohibited from worshipping in public and are arrested indefinitely with gathering in private homes, even for social gathering. Only four religious denominations are recognised, namely the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the Catholic Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea, and Sunni Islam.

In January 2006, His Holiness Patriarch Antonius, Archbishop of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, was removed in violation of the Church Law. Secretary forces arrested him and he remained under house arrest until his death in 2022. The Patriarch suffered from diabetes and was denied proper medical care. The Church now recognises him as Antonius the Confessor, a martyr without bloodshed. In 2004, the Patriarch spoke loudly to support three theologians and medical doctors from the place where he was Orthodox Chair in Asmara. Four Pastors were all arrested together in Asmara since 2004 and have never been charged in any crime. Many other religious leaders and lay people are **imprisoned indefinitely without due process**. Unable to access timely medical attention like the late Patriarch, they have died in prison. For example, Reverend N. died in prison in mid-2024; Pastor S. died in prison in early 2023; and Haji Musa Mohammed



Nu died in prison in March 2018. Some have died outside prison as a handle of the government agents, some supporters of the Patriarch also faced mistreatment. Many monks from all monasteries are detained without trial. However, the total number is unknown. Despite this, he has confirmed the arrests of 21 monks and 12 nuns from Abune Endryas Monastery. The nuns are detained at Barentu and lack of medicine and changing of clothing. Other recognised religious communities also have the same experience. In 2019, the Government began **closing the Catholic order schools** and clinics throughout the country, **arresting clergy and nuns**. In October 2022, the Catholic Bishop of Segheneyti was detained without charge for 74 days with two priests.

St. Paul taught that if one member of the Body of Christ suffers, we all suffer. Today before the UNHRC, Mr. Yohannes GHEBREHIWET is representing all his brothers and sisters in Christ suffering persecuted in our country. He also stands before the UNHRC in solidarity with his beloved Muslim brothers and sisters. **'We are suffering together. We are all persecuted together.'** When prison doors finally opened in Syria and the traumatised emerged from unspeakable horrors, he is told of Eritrea. He prays his Eritrean prisoners will see the day of their freedom. As a Minister of the Church, he closes by appealing to the Government to have mercy on its people, to release the prisoners and to finally fulfil the fundamental rights and freedoms that so many sacrificed and died for. He pleads with the UNHRC not to waive into the efforts to ensure justice and accountability for the Eritrean people.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

**Mr. Yohannes GHEBREHIWET** adds that beyond violating religious freedom, the Eritrean Government systematically attacks political and social rights, detaining countless political prisoners. Thousands of people are held incommunicado, including journalists and 11 senior officials known as G15, and also a former liberation fighter who was imprisoned since 1991 died in prison. As the **United Nations is the last hope of human beings**, he appeals to the UNHRC. The Eritrean young generation needs urgent help to build a new Eritrea that is peaceful and democratic. The health care system remains critically weak, with medical staff and supply shortages. Education is also in crisis. The only university was closed in 2006, forcing students into military institutions like SAWA Military Training Camp. Where the faith, harshly conditioned indoctrination, saw many Eritrean youths of their future driving thousands to flee the country in search of freedom.

To conclude, he highlights three points. First, indefinite detention, including religious and political prisoners. Second, indefinite national service and forced labour. Since 1994, the policy of mandatory, indefinite national service, the young generation is called 'the modern age slavery'. Young women are kept beyond their childbearing years, and young married men are separated from their children, thus forcing a single parenthood in our society. The last one, indefinite power. Without constitution and without an election, **34 years, one man, one party, and one faith system**. The Eritrean Government must release all religious, political, and journalist prisoners immediately and unconditionally, and must stop forcing soldiers into military, indefinite national service. The UNHRC must maintain an investigation of Eritrean human rights crisis, and increase pressure on the Government to respect the human dignity of its citizens. The people of Eritrea will continue to march with the Eritrean young generation in the hope and the light of Lord Jesus Christ, trusting that justice will prevail in Eritrea soon.



As mentioned in his opening remarks, **Mr. Habtom ZERA** restates that what was once intended to be a one-time session has morphed into a long-running saga with predictable plotlines and occasionally recurring characters. In the process, Eritrea has lost appetite for giving responses that it has aptly delivered countless times before. While acknowledging that OHCHR is fulfilling a mandate it has been tasked to execute, Eritrea urges OHCHR to act responsibly nonetheless. It is deeply troubling that OHCHR continues to present updates based on reports recycled mainly from previous mandates, reiterating false allegations. Regrettably, if this pattern persists, it will only undermine constructive dialogue and strain the relationship Eritrea is striving to build. Eritrea has repeatedly expressed its willingness to engage openly and honestly with OHCHR. Eritrea is not a nation that shrieks accountability.

Despite immense challenges, Eritrea has made **significant strides in education, health and social equity**. Achievements consistently overlooked by the SR's narrow perspectives. Eritrea calls for genuine partnership and cooperation, not finger-pointing and condemnation. The SR's mandate, however, offers neither. It remains a relic of a flawed approach that prioritises geopolitics over progress. This mandate also undermines the fundamental principles of national sovereignty, a cornerstone of the UN Charter. As a sovereign State, Eritrea has the right and responsibility to address its internal affairs without undue external interference. The imposition of Special Procedures without Eritrea's consent disregards these principles and treats our nation as a subject of neo-colonial oversight rather than an equal member of the international community. Human rights should not serve as a pretext for meddling in domestic governance. They must be pursued through dialogue and mutual respect, not through unilateral dictates from the UNHRC, squandering as a moral authority. In closing, Eritrea stands ready to engage as an equal partner, not as a target. The onus is on the UNHRC. Eritrea requests Member States to act decisively to terminate this mandate at the 59th session of the UNHRC in June.

On **UPR recommendations**, **Mr. Mohamed Abdelsalam BABIKER**, SR on Eritrea, explains that most of the recommendations of 2019 UPR were not implemented. Eritrea accepted 43% of the recommendations. Eritrea had a selective approach with regard to these recommendations, tending to disregard recommendations specifically on civil and political rights, judicial independence, military service, indefinite detention, and enforced disappearances. All these were not implemented. Turning to **accountability**, there is a need for continuous pressure on Eritrea. There is a need for support for transitional justice in Ethiopia as part of the Eritrea Agreement. There is also a need for support to universal jurisdiction by Member States, who actually have this system in place to prosecute those who committed heinous crimes, including crimes against humanity. It is also important to support to diaspora communities, namely victims' groups and CSOs.

Regarding the **assessment of the mandate** for the last 10 years since the COI, the SR mentions the need to carry out a stop-taking exercise, to assess the progress made, including accountability and implementation of the recommendations of the Commission of Enquiry, and also the recommendations provided by previous Special Rapporteurs. The UNHRC has an obligation to assess to what extent the mechanisms are actually implemented. With regard to **cooperation**, the SR reiterates that his mandate is not selective. His mandate is actually constructive, and asks the representative of the Eritrean Government, after this session, to meet and discuss very important cases related to people who have actually disappeared for 30 years.



**Ms. Ilze BRANDS KEHRIS** reiterates that OHCHR recognises the progress made in some areas such as gender parity, access to education, health services. However, OHCHR is concerned about the overall human rights situation in Eritrea, and welcomes the attention the UNHRC is paying to it through this dialogue. It is critical for Eritrea to begin concretely to address the pervasive impunity for past and ongoing human rights violations, guaranteeing the rights for everyone, and take the steps to address those recurring human rights issues that still remain on the table, even though OHCHR has repeated them from before - arbitrary arrests, detentions, as well as incommunicado detention, in particular detaining individuals for years without trials, and the indefinite National Military Service and related human rights concerns. OHCHR reiterates very strongly its continued readiness to support the Government of Eritrea in undertaking the necessary legal, institutional reforms to ensure respect of human rights. OHCHR would be glad to continue working in cooperation with Eritrea to improve the situation and to support the country, including in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and of the recommendations from the UN human rights mechanisms such as UPR and the Committee on Rights of the Child. Finally, while welcoming already the ratification of the CRPD, OHCHR would also encourage Eritrea to ratify the remaining core UN human rights treaties, in particular Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

## INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

### Views Expressed by State Delegations

**Latvia jointly with the Nordic-Baltic countries** welcome Eritrea's ratification of the CRPD and steps taken in the field of social rights. However, they remain deeply concerned by the human rights situation in Eritrea. Fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of opinion, association, religion and expression of the people of Eritrea, are continuously repressed. The widespread and systematic repression of dissent, subjecting government critics to enforced disappearances and unlawful detentions remain of grave concern. The Nordic-Baltic countries reiterate their call on the Eritrean authorities to adhere to the rule of law and full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in line with its international obligations. They also call on the Government of Eritrea to withdraw any remaining Eritrean forces from the Tigray region of Ethiopia and investigate all alleged violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by these forces. The Nordic-Baltic countries urge the Eritrean authorities to fully cooperate with international human rights mechanisms and to take immediate action to address the pressing human rights issues in the country.

On behalf of the **African Group, Ghana** strongly believes in universality, objectivity and non-selectivity in addressing human rights issues everywhere, as set forth in UNGA Resolution 60/251. In this regard, it firmly opposes politicisation and double standards. The African Group welcomes Eritrea's presentation of its Fifth and Sixth Combined Periodic Report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for the period 2014-2019, as well as Eritrea's ratification of the CRPD on 20 December 2024. In this context, the international community is encouraged to support Eritrea in its efforts. In this spirit, the Africa Group calls on Eritrea and UN mechanisms to continue their cooperation and engagement in a positive manner.





On behalf of the **Group of Friends in Defence of the UN Charter**, **Venezuela** believes that over the past 13 years, Eritrea has been the subject of a politically motivated and selective mandate, one of confrontation. This runs counter to the true promotion and protection of human rights throughout the world. Eritrea firmly continues to meet the economic and social needs of its citizens, and their continuing efforts to safeguard the human rights of its people, despite ongoing external pressure because of geopolitical interests. Their human rights situation is made worse by the imposition of unilateral coercive measures, which run counter to their socio-economic needs. The Group of Friends in Defence of the UN Charter once again emphasises that equality is the best way to achieve common goals, whereas undue double standards and selectivity run counter to the promotion of human rights. In the light of these considerations, it is essential for the mandate on Eritrea, which is unjustified, to ensure that the country can continue its progress unimpeded.

**Luxembourg** emphasises systematic human rights violations, sexual violence in military service, illegal taxation, and targeting of draft evaders; and calls for troop withdrawal from Ethiopia. It further suggests that the violence of the military service has produced a contagion effect.

**Switzerland** calls for transparent mechanisms to ensure implementation of human rights obligations, enforcement of laws against child marriage and the death penalty, and international efforts to combat impunity.

**Saudi Arabia** calls for constructive dialogue, international support, and capacity-building efforts.

The **Democratic People's Republic of Korea** rejects the mandate as politically motivated by qualifying it as unproductive, and encourages Eritrea's progress.

**Iran** emphasises socio-economic and cultural contexts, calling for capacity-building, and stressing impartiality and neutrality.

**Djibouti** condemns incommunicado detentions and requests information on 13 prisoners of war held by Eritrea.

**Zimbabwe** applauds Eritrea's ratification of the CRPD, while condemning the perceived vilification and politicisation of the human rights situation in Eritrea for hindering progress and perpetuating suffering.

**Burkina Faso** notes Eritrea's progress in education and healthcare while criticising the lack of cooperation with the Eritrean Government in the report's preparation. It calls for impartiality.

**Ghana** calls for technical assistance, capacity-building and the development of mutual trust. Eritrean authorities should continue people centred policies based on local needs and stability. Ghana supports the idea of 'African approaches to African problems'.

**Pakistan** supports Eritrea's engagement with UN bodies and calls for a review of the mandate's role in polarisation.

**Cameroon** puts emphasis on an approach founded on inclusive dialogue, mutual respect, and local institution-building.



Criticising the UNHRC's over-interference in developing countries, **China** highlights Eritrea's progress, while reiterating its opposition to human rights mandates without State consent. Lack of consent undermines the use of crucial UN resources and instrumentalises human rights.

**Cuba** opposes the mandate as a violation of Eritrea's sovereignty, calling for the removal of sanctions as a first meaningful step.

The **Lao PDR** stresses that the international community should consider the priorities and local needs of people in Eritrea.

**Cambodia** notes the commendable progress and argues that progress is rooted in an even-handed approach.

**Ethiopia** reiterates its commitment to ensuring accountability for abuses committed on its territory.

**Equatorial Guinea** argues that human rights should not be politicised and stressed Eritrea's socioeconomic progress despite external pressures.

The **United Kingdom** expresses concern over lack of engagement with the SR, called for reforms of the National Service Programme, while emphasising young people's right to choose their own careers. The UK further affirmed that instances of harassment of Eritrean refugees in the UK will not be tolerated.

**Belarus** welcomes the consistent improvements in the human rights situation of Eritrea and the successful submissions of reports to relevant UN treaty bodies. Belarus reiterates that country-specific mandates without consent misuses human rights and hampers global dialogue.

**Egypt** stresses that the UNHRC should operate with State consent and provide technical assistance instead of external pressure.

**Burundi** emphasises the lack of consent from Eritrea to this mandate.

**Sudan** acknowledges the commitment from Eritrea to improving the human rights situation.

**Venezuela** describes the mandate as hostile and evidence of weaponisation of human rights by a selection of Western states. It further emphasises need for genuine dialogue that respects the principles of the UN Charter.

**Russia** acknowledges Eritrea's efforts to improve human rights and argues that international pressure was unnecessary. It also cautions the increasing risk of instability caused by armed groups.

**South Sudan** calls for respect for the principles of the UN Charter, especially neutrality, impartiality, and non-selectivity.

**Uganda** posits that the UPR remains the primary mechanism to ensure the fulfilment of human rights obligations. Applauding the relevant submissions from Eritrea, Uganda emphasises the need for sustainable engagement and the avoiding of mandates without consent.



**Nicaragua** acknowledges the significant headway in relation to gender equality, especially the land ownership reforms, while rejecting the colonial and neocolonial interests pertaining to the mandate.

**Sri Lanka** welcomes the work of the Eritrean Government in the advancement of human rights, while stressing that country specific mandates without state consent are counterproductive.

The **Philippines** emphasises the agency of Eritrean people and the need to empower duty bearers. It reaffirms its position against country specific mandates without State consent on the basis that they do not yield results on the ground. Instead, it encourages adherence to the UN Sustainable Development Goals Cooperation Framework and more cost-effective solutions.

**Somalia** highlights progress in maternal and child health and the core pillars of sustainable development.

**Yemen** calls on the national authorities to implement the relevant recommendations.

**Kenya** calls for a balanced perspective, most notably with a greater engagement with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, and consensual engagement with the UN. Kenya also emphasises that all states have a responsibility to protect human rights.

**Ireland** calls for an end to collective punishment of draft evaders and for the release of arbitrarily detained individuals.

#### **Views Expressed by Intergovernmental Organisations**

The **European Union** welcomes progress made in social rights in Eritrea, notably in health and education. The EU encourages Eritrea to continue strengthening its partnership with the UN and welcomes the ratification of the CRPD. The EU continues to call on Eritrea to engage constructively with the Special Rapporteur and grant him full access. Nevertheless, it remains highly concerned by the human rights situation in the country. Therefore, it calls on Eritrea to end arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, torture, transnational repression, to open up civic space and set up independent rule of law institutions. The EU reiterates its call to end the obligatory and indefinite national service, including the reported constriction of children, and hold the right of conscientious objection. It calls on Eritrea to complete the full withdrawal from Ethiopian territory and to carry out credible investigations into alleged violations and abuses. It welcomes the reduction in FGM and early enforced marriages. The EU encourages Eritrea to further address the findings of the UN Child Rights Committee, and stands ready to continue its engagement with Eritrea and its people.

#### **Views Expressed by Non-Governmental Organisations**

**Jubilee Campaign** states that Eritrea's UNHRC membership for six years brought no human rights improvements. It has participated in every UPR cycle, but failed to implement accepted recommendations. While it has ratified some international conventions, none have been meaningfully realised, making them empty commitments as the country's human rights situation continues to deteriorate. The National Assembly last convened in February 2002, 23 years ago, leaving the country without a functioning legislative body. The 1997 Constitution remains unimplemented, and there is no independent judiciary, free press, or religious freedom.



Fundamental rights are ignored, while arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and torture in secret prisons are widespread. Thousands have been languishing in over 300 prisons for years without due process. Countless citizens, including children, remain trapped in indefinite national service with no way out. This has fuelled a mass exodus, forcing many to risk trafficking, abuse, and further mistreatment, highlighting the desperate conditions Eritreans face daily. Eritrea remains one of the world's most repressive countries. The international community must remain vigilant, demand accountability and real change, and stand in solidarity with Eritrea.

**East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project** points out that last year, the UNHRC did the right thing by extending the Special Rapporteur's mandate. It was important to do so to cover the entirety of Eritrea's membership in the UNHRC. For Eritrea, six years of membership meant six years of scrutiny. It was also important to send a message to states that seek to join the UNHRC to evade scrutiny. Eritrea joined the UNHRC to cover up its abuses, but its manoeuvre failed as states made clear that membership is not a shield against scrutiny. In the country, violations continue with impunity. They include arbitrary arrests and detention, disappearances, killings, torture, forced labour, SGBV, severe violations of civic space, and indefinite conscription into national service. Three years after the cessation of hostilities agreement regarding Tigray, fears are growing over another round of armed conflict. Eritrean authorities have issued a directive to regional administrations to register and mobilise citizens under 60 for military retraining. It hence calls on states to urge Eritrea and other regional actors to halt escalation towards war. Next June, the UNHRC should further move away from the approach that's prevailed since 2019, a short and procedural annual resolution. The next resolution should be substantive. It should fully and accurately reflect the country's human rights situation, including the domestic situation and extraterritorial attacks against the diaspora.

**World Evangelical Alliance** is deeply concerned about the number of detained Christians held without being charged with an offence in Eritrea. These detainees are held in appalling conditions, including overcrowding and torture. They do not have access to legal representation and due process of law. Only four religious groups are officially recognised in Eritrea. In 2002, the government imposed a registration system for all other religious groups. However, after churches and other religious organisations submitted the required documents, the Government did not register them. Thereafter, Church leaders and those sharing their faith or religious literature from other Christian traditions have been subject to being arrested and detained. The chair of the Eritrean Evangelical Alliance, Dr. Kiflu Gebremeskel, has been in prison in Eritrea since May 2004. That is more than 20 years in prison without charge. The World Evangelical Alliance urges the Government of Eritrea to comply with its human rights obligations; to invite the SR on the situation of human rights in Eritrea and other special procedures for country visits; to allow investigations; and to assist the government to move towards compliance with international law in its application of the rule of law, freedom of religion, and other human rights.

**Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)** reports further violations of freedom of religion or belief targeting young people and minors. On 1st November 2024, four teenage Jehovah's Witnesses, who did not contribute towards a political fund because political neutrality is the core to their belief, were arrested at school. At the time of recording, they remain in Mysore prison. In early December, Eritrean security police raided a house where 27 secondary school students between the ages of 14 and 16 had gathered to pray and worship. They were held at a police station for





several days, then transferred to Mysore, where they too remain. Furthermore, around 50 of the 103 students arrested in April 2023 while recording worship music for YouTube remain in Mysore, despite belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, one of the three permitted denominations. CSW urges Eritrea to release all prisoners of conscience immediately and without precondition. It also reiterates its call for the creation of an international judicial mechanism to hold identified perpetrators of human rights violations in Eritrea and transnationally to account.

Over the past year, **Amnesty International** has monitored the continued arbitrary detention and summary deportation of Eritrean refugees. Credible reports from Ethiopia indicate that within the last three months alone, more than 600 Eritreans have been forcibly returned. The human rights situation of Eritrean refugees remains dire, not only in Ethiopia but also in Sudan. In August 2024, Amnesty documented two forced returns of around 180 Eritreans to Eritrea, violating their legal rights protection and the principle of non-refoulement. One of the human rights violations that causes many Eritreans to flee is the country's decade-long forced and indefinite conscription, which amounts to forced labour and, at times, to slavery. In February 2025, credible media reports indicated that the Eritrean Government has intensified military mobilisation. This follows escalating tension between Ethiopian and Eritrean officials that have endangered Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia. Amnesty International urges all Member States of the UNHRC to uphold their obligations to protect Eritrean refugees from forced return, detention and abuse. Next year will mark 10 years since the COI on Eritrea found that crimes under international law may have occurred. We see no progress since these findings.

**IBAHRI** is highly concerned about reports of growing tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia, including reports about Eritrea's mobilisation efforts and what these tensions can turn into. As communities in Ethiopia continue to struggle with the consequences of the Tigray War and atrocities across other parts of Ethiopia, this is the time to exercise restraint to protect the lives of the people in the region. We need lasting peace in the region. This lasting peace will not be achieved without justice and accountability for atrocity crimes, including as perpetrated by the Eritrean troops in Tigray after the Cassation of Hostilities Agreement in November 2022. Despite the agreement, Eritrean troops continue to be present in Tigray and continue to perpetrate atrocities such as sexual violence, the kidnapping and enforced disappearance of civilians, extrajudicial executions and looting, among others. IBAHRI calls upon Eritrea to immediately stop all atrocities and gross human rights violations in Eritrea and the Tigray region. It further calls upon UN Member States to ensure independent investigations of all human rights violations and atrocity crimes, establish an investigation and accountability mechanism to collect and preserve evidence of all the atrocities, and identify avenues for ensuring justice and reparations to all victims in Eritrea and the Tigray region.

**Interfaith International** takes good note of the SR's recommendations and support the renewal of his mandate. Since the adoption of the most recent UPR report, Interfaith International has seen scant progress in Eritrea. In fact, it deplores the refusal of the country to cooperate with the SR and special procedures. Interfaith International expresses its deep concern at the ongoing serious human rights violations, notably harassment of human rights defenders, persecution of religious minorities, extrajudicial killings, acts of torture, another cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment and punishment, the practise of forced labour, and the restrictions to the freedoms of



expression of an association. To date, the absence of structural reform gravely encourages the mass exodus of Eritreans that are fleeing terror.

### **FACTS & FIGURES ON ID PARTICIPATION**

**36** State Delegations

**1** Intergovernmental Organisation

**7** Non-Governmental Organisations