



**STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL WEDNESDAY 8 JUNE 2016  
AT 11:30 CENTRAL EUROPEAN TIME (11:30 CET)**

## **UN INQUIRY FINDS CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY IN ERITREA**

**Geneva (8 June 2016)** – Crimes against humanity have been committed in a widespread and systematic manner in Eritrean detention facilities, military training camps and other locations across the country over the past 25 years, according to a new report by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea, released Wednesday.

Crimes of enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, torture, persecution, rape, murder and other inhumane acts have been committed as part of a campaign to instil fear in, deter opposition from and ultimately to control the Eritrean civilian population since Eritrean authorities took control of Eritrean territory in 1991, the report says.

“Eritrea is an authoritarian State. There is no independent judiciary, no national assembly and there are no other democratic institutions in Eritrea. This has created a governance and rule of law vacuum, resulting in a climate of impunity for crimes against humanity to be perpetrated over a quarter of a century. These crimes are still occurring today,” said Mike Smith, chair of the Commission of Inquiry.

“There is no genuine prospect of the Eritrean judicial system holding perpetrators to account in a fair and transparent manner. The perpetrators of these crimes must face justice and the victims’ voices must be heard. The international community should now take steps, including using the International Criminal Court, national courts and other available mechanisms to ensure there is accountability for the atrocities being committed in Eritrea,” said Smith.

The report highlights that “Eritreans also continue to be subjected to indefinite national service, arbitrary detention, reprisals for the alleged conduct of family members, discrimination on religious or ethnic grounds, sexual and gender-based violence and killings.”

The indefinite duration of military and national service programmes are frequently cited by Eritreans as the main reason for fleeing the country. In 2015, 47,025 Eritreans applied for asylum in Europe, many making the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean in unsafe boats, exploited by smugglers in search of safety.

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In addition, the report notes that no improvement was found in the human rights situation documented in Eritrea during the first Commission of Inquiry report published in June 2015.

The report identifies that “particular individuals, including officials at the highest levels of State, the ruling party – the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice – and commanding officers bear responsibility for crimes against humanity and other gross human rights violations.”

The report further states that “the National Security Office is responsible for most cases of arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance and torture in official and unofficial detention centres.”

Dossiers of evidence have been compiled on a number of individuals the Commission has reasonable grounds to believe bear responsibility for crimes against humanity. This evidence will be made available at the appropriate time to relevant institutions, including courts of law, following strict witness protection requirements, to ensure there is justice for the Eritrean people.

The patterns of conduct described in the report are based on 833 interviews with Eritreans and 160 written submissions received during the first term of the Commission of Inquiry, from mid-2014 to mid-2015.

The Commission received some 45,000 written submissions in the course of its second investigation. The vast majority of these were group letters and petitions critical of the Commission’s first report.

These submissions contained common themes, similar content and were the direct result of an organised Government campaign to attempt to discredit the Inquiry. A thorough analysis of these written submissions was conducted and the Commission concluded that they added no substantial information relating to its investigations.

The report states that “the façade of calm and normality that is apparent to the occasional visitor to the country, and others confined to sections of the capital, belies the consistent patterns of serious human right violations.”

The report further states “that the types of gross human rights violations in Eritrea documented by the Commission … are not committed on the streets of Asmara, but rather behind the walls of detention facilities and in military training camps. Torture and rape are not normally perpetuated in the open.”

Despite requests to the Government of Eritrea, the Commission was denied access to visit the country. The Commission remains open to visiting Eritrea to present its latest findings and recommendations directly to the Government.

**ENDS**

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**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- For more information please contact Dan McNorton on [dmcnorton@ohchr.org](mailto:dmcnorton@ohchr.org) or +41 79 618 3474.
- Further media materials, including video, B-roll, photos, witnesses testimonies, factographs are available at: [www.ohchr.org/ColEritrea/](http://www.ohchr.org/ColEritrea/)
- Crimes against humanity are acts committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population, even in the absence of an armed conflict.
- The Commission of Inquiry on human rights in Eritrea was first established by the Human Rights Council in June 2014.
- The Commission's first report was published on 8 June 2015 and documented a number of grave human rights violations in the State's military/national service programmes, including their prolonged and indefinite duration, abusive conditions and the use of conscripts as forced labour.
- The Commission of Inquiry was instructed by the UN's Human Rights Council in July 2015 to further "investigate systematic, widespread and gross violations of human rights in Eritrea with a view to ensuring accountability, including where these violations may amount to crimes as against humanity."
- Interviews were conducted in 13 countries – Australia, Canada, Djibouti, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.
- The Commission consists of three independent experts: Chairperson Mr. Mike Smith (Australia), Mr. Victor Dankwa (Ghana) and Ms. Sheila B. Keetharuth (Mauritius), who is also the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea.
- The Commission of Inquiry is scheduled to present its report to the Human Rights Council in Geneva on 21 June 2016.

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