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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Jubilee Campaign, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 August 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Interactive dialogue with the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention regarding Arbitrary Detentions in the State of Eritrea and other Human Rights abuses

Jubilee Campaign seeks to highlight the recently deteriorating human rights, women's rights, and religious freedom situation in the State of Eritrea, as well as provide a brief list of recommendations of actions for the United Nations Human Rights Council and the State of Eritrea. The detainment of innocent religious practitioners, arbitrary closure of church-funded and church-operated clinics, as well as the sexual abuse of women both in detainment centers and in military service are areas that need to be addressed.

Jubilee Campaign commends the establishment of a peace treaty between the State of Eritrea and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in a well-intended and purposeful step towards peace between and within the two nations. It would be a disservice however, to fail to mention the reversal of their open-border policy, hampering progress made for freedom of movement. Jubilee Campaign echoes the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea in regard to the human rights situation within the State of Eritrea, "[that] despite the improved regional climate for peace and security, the human rights situation in Eritrea remains unchanged."

The State of Eritrea has come to the attention of the international community for cases of extrajudicial torture and punishment in detention centers, with a specific set of sexual crimes targeting women specifically, such as harassment, groping, and, in many cases, rape. Moreover, concerns regarding arbitrary arrests of religiously affiliated Eritreans as well as the closure of clinics that the Catholic Church operates and funds as a charitable organization.

Jubilee Campaign believes it is our moral obligation to provide a list of human rights violations, religious persecution, and gender-based persecution and abuse to be addressed in a reasonable fashion and timely manner.

Arbitrary Detention of Religious affiliates

The State of Eritrea recognizes only four religions: Eritrean Orthodox Christianity, Sunni Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Evangelical Christianity. Despite their status as legal religions however, individuals practicing such religions are not completely free to practice, as the government utilizes heavy surveillance to monitor that they are not conducting activity that Eritrea views as anti-government. In fact, many of them face unjust imprisonment.

In July 2019 Eritrean Orthodox Patriarch Abune Antonios, who has been held under house arrest since 2007 for refusing government inspection and monitoring of the Church's religious activity, was officially excommunicated on charges of heresy. Despite promises by the five bishops who excommunicated him that authorities would keep him safe and provide him with food, a video released in early 2019 displayed Patriarch Antonios himself explaining that he has been medically neglected, as he has not received treatment for his high blood pressure nor diabetes. His health is of great concern due to his age of 92 years old and his status as the leader of the Eritrean Orthodox Church.

On June 13th, 2019, five Eritrean Orthodox Christian monks, Aba Kibreab Tekie, Aba Gebremedhin, Aba Kidanemariam Tekeste, Aba Gebretensae Zemichael, and Aba Gebretensae Tewoldhemedhin were arrested under similar charges of refusing government involvement and inspection and have since been unjustly held in detainment centers without due process.

In May 2019, 170 Evangelical Christian Eritreans were arrested, and only a handful of them have since been released. This is of concern, as in the past many of these religious prisoners have faced torture and unsanitary conditions, many of them passing away in confinement before ever securing their release. Evangelical Christian Eritreans are not included in the four recognized religions in the State of Eritrea.

One religious group that faces imprisonment and mistreatment by the Eritrean government is Jehovah's Witness, who, according to the government, refuse to recognize the authority of the government and therefore have become an illegal religious sect in Eritrea. Since February of 2019, over 50 Jehovah's Witnesses have been detained.

All the mentioned cases of deprivation of liberty are a direct result of the individuals exercising their rights or freedoms as guaranteed by Articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The State of Eritrea by incarcerating individuals for their religious practice is contravening international law. Moreover, the state of Eritrea has incarcerated said individuals without the right to a fair trial in contravention of article 10 of UDHR and article 17(3) of the constitution of Eritrea where it states:

Every person arrested or detained shall be informed of the grounds for his arrest or detention and of the rights he has in connection with his arrest or detention in a language he understands.

The arrests in May 2019 of Evangelical Christians were reported to have never received a charge. Moreover, as mentioned, conditions in the prisons are known to be unsanitary and religious prisoners have faced torture.

While some of these individuals who have been incarcerated for their religious affiliation have been released from prison, such as the 35 Eritrean Christians, released in 2018, Evangelical pastor Oqbamichel Haiminot, released in June 2018, and some of the 170 Christians arrested in May of 2019 who have since been released, the indiscriminate incarcerations demonstrate religious intolerance and distrust within Eritrea.

Forced closure of Catholic Church Clinics

Since mid-June of 2019, Catholic Church-run hospitals and clinics have been repeatedly, forcibly closed and seized by the State of Eritrea after the Church refused to sign over the clinics to the government. As of August 2019, a known 20 medical centers have been closed, mostly in rural areas. This action has many implications; these clinics have historically provided accessible and affordable health care in remote locations where the population is predominantly impoverished and where they are exposed to tropical and transferrable illnesses.

The State of Eritrea has consistently failed to provide adequate and efficient health services to its citizens, so the Catholic Church as well as other nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations have worked charitably to fill in where the government lacks.

Women in the Military and in prison

In Eritrea, men and women are recruited to serve in the military for an unlimited amount of time with conscription times reaching 15 years and above. Women soldiers face the majority of human rights violations, for example, many of the women that work among their male counterparts in the military are subject to sexual harassment and rape at high rates.

Women who have been repatriated to Eritrea after attempting to and seek asylum in neighboring nations have been subjected to rape in detention centers. Women who know they are to be forcefully returned to Eritrea to serve in prison, therefore, often seek out contraceptive injections. In the situation that a woman does become pregnant from rape, they receive little to no prenatal care and face an increased risk of miscarriage and postpartum complications. In addition to unwanted pregnancy, rape of women soldiers has also caused high rates of sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS.

Recommendations to the government of Eritrea:

Jubilee Campaign calls upon the State of Eritrea to take effective measures to:

- Ensure entry for the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief into the State of Eritrea.
- Ensure religious prisoners and repatriated Eritreans who have been unjustly arrested the right of due process, including the right to a fair trial.
- Release unconditionally prisoners who have been arrested solely for their religious affiliation, adherence, practice, and tradition, such as Pentecostal Christians, Evangelical Christians, Eritrean Orthodox Christians, and Jehovah's Witnesses.
- Ensure that individuals who are incarcerated are treated with humanity.
- Halt the arrests and detainments of those who have an opposing ideology or adhere to a certain religion in light of Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states, "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile."
- Recognize and register the applications of Meherte Yesus Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Faith Mission religious institutions in developmental work, the Seventh day Adventist Church, and the Baha'i movement. Each of them has followed the registration process but has not received a confirmation since they applied in 2002.
- Release Patriarch Abune Antonios from inhumane treatment and incarceration.
- Welcome reporting mechanisms and monitoring systems to secure the criminalization of sexual assault and rape of women and children within detention centers.
- Introduce prenatal and postpartum care, as well as mental and physical therapy and/or counselling for women who have become pregnant from rape within Eritrean prison centers.
- Establish legal procedures to effectively carry out penal punishment on those convicted of rape and sexual assault.

Recommendations to the Human Rights Council:

Jubilee Campaign urges the United Nations Human Rights Council to:

- Encourage the State of Eritrea to live up to the standards of international human rights and religious freedom.
 - Strongly condemn the State of Eritrea should they fail to make genuine improvements and measures to live up to its international commitments as a member of the Human Rights Council including the freedom of religion and belief.
 - Advise and assist the State of Eritrea in their efforts to meet these standards through examples of best practice.
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