



General Assembly

Distr.: General
14 February 2019

English only

Human Rights Council

Fortieth session

25 February–22 March 2019

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, 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.

[5 February 2019]

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



Human Rights in Eritrea

Introduction

Maat for Peace and Development of Human Rights association (Egypt) presents this written intervention about Human Right situation in Eritrea in the past period. This situation is witnessing several developments on different levels despite the relation breakthrough with the regional and international actors. The results of this breakthrough were as the following:

A. Eritrea, within 18 countries, was elected by the UN General Assembly as a member of Human Rights Council for three years starting from January 2019. Eritrea won 160 from total 193 voting voice.¹

B. UN Security Council resolution removed Eritrea's sanctions. These sanctions included Lifting of arms embargoes, travel bans, asset freezes and targeted sanctions which were previously imposed on Eritrea from the council. Therefore, the council announced the end of mandate of the special rapporteur on Eritrea from mid December 2018²

As this breakthrough begins internationally, there are still observations about the internal human rights situation.

First: updates on human rights situation in Eritrea

Eritreans are still facing some humanitarian problems, mainly:

A) Situation of refugees and migrants:

Thousands of Eritreans face serious human rights violations as they leave the country to transit and destination countries. The Sudan remains a major transit area for Eritrean refugees. In one case in August 2017, the Sudanese courts deported 104 refugees to Eritrea where they would be at risk of severe human rights violations. Eritreans have also been at risk of arbitrary detention, kidnapping, sexual assault and ill-treatment on their way to Europe³.

Eritrean migrants were not able to seek protection in Israel and have been imprisoned. Till the end of September 2017, there were 27,018 Eritreans in Israel. Israeli procedures state that the "infiltrator" who does not agree to leave voluntarily faces "enforcement and deportation procedures"⁴

B) Freedom of speech:

Press and media repression, abuses and violence against journalists continue. Eritrea had the lowest rate for press freedom for 10 years among the 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders. There was a progress in 2017 and 2018 where it ranked 179th⁵. It is noted that the authorities arrested hundreds of oppositionist after the death of a school principal who refused government orders while detention.⁶

¹ Meetings Coverages, "General Assembly Elects 18 Member States to Human Rights Council, Allowing Vote by 3 Member States in Article 19 Exemption over Financial Dues", United Nations Website, Published on: <https://bit.ly/2CFIU7p>, Access Date: 4/2/2019

² United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2444 (2018) Adopted by the Security Council at its 8398th meeting, on 14 November 2018. For more details about the resolution, Follow this link: [http://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2444\(2018\)](http://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2444(2018))

³ THE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL Report 2017/18, "Human Rights in Eritrea 2017/2018", on this link: <https://bit.ly/100MKD9>, access date: 20/12/2018.

⁴ Human Rights Watch, "Israel: Don't Lock Up Asylum Seekers", Published on Human Rights Watch Website, on: January 22, 2018, on this link: <https://bit.ly/2G1NWbE>, access date: 12/12/2018.

⁵ The World Press Freedom Index, "RSF Index 2018: Hatred of journalism threatens democracies", Published annually by Reporters Without Borders, on this link: <https://bit.ly/2JqOb0W>, Access date: 2/2/2019.

⁶ Elias Biryabarema, "Eritrea arrests hundreds of perceived opponents: U.N.", 14/3/2018, Reuters, on this link: <https://reut.rs/2GloPTP>, access date: 2/2/2019.

C) Forced labor:

Despite repeated appeals by the international community to the Government to reduce the duration of compulsory conscription to 18 months, the extension of compulsory conscription continued for an open period. Although the minimum age for legal recruitment is 18 years old, children, women and older persons continue to be subjected to military training by "The People's Army". They receive weapons and are assigned duties under the threat of disciplinary sanctions, such as detention, fines or hard labor.⁷

D) Women and children rights:

Malnutrition rates have increased over the last few years in four of six regions of Eritrea. Research and studies indicate that about 22,000 children under the age of five will be affected by severe malnutrition. Child, under the age of five, mortality rate reached 43.1 from every thousand born children⁸.

Women also face difficult circumstances especially with forced conscription, where they are subjected to sexual and physical violence, particularly at "SAWA Defense Training Center". The Government has denied that. Reports indicate that girls are forced to marry at a young age to avoid conscription⁹.

E) Economic and Social Rights:

Economic and social rights continue to decline. Although the Government has implemented some measures to improve poverty, these attempts didn't decrease its severity. The poverty rate in Eritrea is about 66% of the population as they suffer from severe shortage of resources. While the literacy rate is estimated at 49%; the weak education system does not help in solving poverty problems¹⁰.

There is a major problem in dealing with water scarcity particularly in Asmara. More people are reported to be leaving the drought-affected areas. The reports also noted that strict government regulations, which limit cash withdrawals from retail accounts, prevent people from buying enough food and other main resources¹¹. Eritrea is located in Africa's most starving eastern region, with 31.4 percent of its citizens suffering from malnutrition¹²

Eritreans also suffer from a decline in the right to health. The probability of death between the ages of 15 and 60 reached 289/215 per 1,000 inhabitants. While total health expenditure represents a small percentage of Gross National Income estimated at 3.3%¹³.

Eritreans also suffer from all kinds of corruption. This affects their economic and social rights which deprive them from equal opportunities and social justice. According to The Corruption Perceptions Index among 180 countries, Eritrea was number 164 in 2016, 165 in 2017, and 157 in 2018¹⁴.

As a result, it should be noted that these are the most prominent observations on the human rights situation in Eritrea, which continue to deteriorate, reflecting the urgent need of the Eritrean authorities to improve the current situation.

⁷ THE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL Report 2017/18, op.cit.

⁸ UNICEF Data, "Monitoring the situation of children and women", published on: UNICEF Website, on this link: <https://data.unicef.org/country/eri/#>, access date: 2/2/2019.

⁹ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), "CEDAW/C/ERI/CO/5", 15/3/2015, on the following link: <https://bit.ly/2RF8pbb>

¹⁰ Karyn Adams, "Disastrous Poverty in Eritrea", published on: The Borgen Project, 27/9/2017, on this link: <https://bit.ly/2UFZ0ld>, access date: 1/1/2019.

¹¹ THE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL Report 2017/18, op.cit.

¹² The State of Food Security & Nutrition around the World, Full Report, UN FAO, on this link: <https://bit.ly/2eZavBP>, access date: 4/2/2019

¹³ Country Profile of Eritrea, "Health profile", published on World Health Organization Website, on this link: <https://www.who.int/countries/eri/en/>, Access date: 1/1/2019.

¹⁴ The Annual Corruption Perceptions Index, on these links: 2016 <https://bit.ly/2jvgDCt>, 2017 <https://bit.ly/2BJaDBF>, 2018 <https://bit.ly/2B7SAEu>

Second: Recommendations

Believing in the important role played by civil society organizations in the recruitment and use of human rights mechanisms and tools to promote human rights, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights association presents some recommends to the Government of Eritrea:

- A) To allow international organizations and their representatives to conduct more country visits to Eritrea. In order to provide the human rights situation transparently; thus, provide appropriate assistance.
- B) To work out a strategy for the return of migrants who suffer in the countries of transit and destination, including the improvement of the situation of refugees and displaced persons. It is important to conclude the situation with Eritrean neighbors.
- C) To give more opportunities general political arena participation, to stop the repression of journalists and media personnel, to release peaceful dissidents , to open the way for forming civil associations, to allow international organizations to carry out their work inside the country, and to lift the government's control on trade unions.
- D) To define an ending period for compulsory conscription, with the exclusion of vulnerable groups. And to open extensive investigations about sexual violence against women in training camps.
- E) To continue to work on improving the health and psychological environment of children, while providing them with suitable food environment, in order to cope with the high mortality rates especially in their early age.
- F) To take advantage of positive developments in their relations with the regional and international environment, and to cooperate to address the high rates of poverty through logistical and financial assistance.
- G) To cooperate extensively with Ethiopia to implement Integrated Water Resources Management Program IWRM to address the severe water shortage problem.
- H) To Continue efforts to fight corruption from the sources, through a transparent and shared vision for all stakeholders in the country.
