

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 64/003/2008

20 June 2008

UA 178/08      Fear of arbitrary arrest/fear of torture/ill-treatment/incommunicado detention

ERITREA      Up to 820 Eritreans including men, women and children

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The Egyptian authorities organised a mass forcible return of Eritreans from Egypt to Eritrea starting on 11 June. Amnesty International believes that up to 820 asylum-seekers are now in Eritrea and are at grave risk of arbitrary arrest, incommunicado detention, torture or other forms of ill-treatment.

Other refugees and asylum-seekers returned to Eritrea recently have been detained incommunicado, and ill-treated. Two asylum-seekers who were returned to Eritrea by the German authorities on 14 May are believed to have been arrested on arrival, and have not been seen since (See UA 145/08, AFR 64/002/2008, 29 May 2008). Another asylum-seeker returned from the UK in November 2007 was detained in inhumane conditions and ill-treated before being released (see UA 319/07, AFR 64/010/2007, 29 November 2007).

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has issued guidelines to all governments opposing return to Eritrea of rejected Eritrean asylum seekers on the grounds of the record of serious human rights violations in Eritrea. These guidelines are still in force.

Thousands of people are detained incommunicado in Eritrea, in secret and indefinitely, without charge or trial. They have been arrested for suspected opposition to the government, practicing their religious beliefs as members of banned evangelical or other churches, evading military conscription or trying to flee the country.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Since 11 June, the Egyptian authorities have been organizing mass forced deportation of Eritrean asylum-seekers from Egypt to Eritrea. It is reported that Egypt Air has been assisting the authorities by providing transportation.

The asylum-seekers were told they were being returned. Some begged the security forces not to deport them and even threatened to kill themselves. They were searched to make sure they were not carrying anything they could use to harm themselves. They did not physically resist being put on the plane, but continued to cry and beg for mercy. Among the asylum-seekers were women and children. (See UA 165/08 (MDE 12/011/2008, 12 June 2008, and follow-up for further details). It is feared that approximately 800 other asylum-seekers are at risk of being forcibly returned from Egypt to Eritrea. On 15 June, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt announced that the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Egypt would be granted access to the Eritreans to assess their asylum claims. However, on 19 June the UNHCR issued a statement which indicated that they had been unable to obtain access to certain detention locations in Egypt, although they had obtained access to some.

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Tigrinya, Arabic or in your own language:**

- urging the authorities to disclose the names and whereabouts of all the Eritreans who have been forcibly returned from Egypt since 11 June 2008;
- urging the authorities not to detain, torture or ill-treat those who have been returned;
- reminding the authorities that enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment are prohibited under international law.

**APPEALS TO:**

President

His Excellency President Issayas Afewerki

Office of the President

P O Box 257, Asmara, Eritrea

**Fax: +2911 123 788 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Justice

Ms Fawzia Hashim

Ministry of Justice

P O Box 241, Asmara, Eritrea

**Fax: +2911 126 422**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

Commissioner of Police

Ministry of Internal Affairs, P O Box 1223, Asmara, Eritrea

**Salutation: Dear Commissioner**

and to diplomatic representatives of x accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 August 2008.