



## Eritrea: Oral intervention at the 23<sup>rd</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council (27 May – 14 June 2013)

AI Index: AFR 64/008/2013  
4 June 2013

### Item 4: Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

#### Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea

Mr. President,

Arbitrary arrest and detention without charge have been used on a vast scale in Eritrea to silence all dissent and to punish anyone who refuses to comply with the manifold restrictions the government places on human rights.

Amnesty International assesses that since Eritrea's independence, at least 10,000 political prisoners have been detained. There are certainly numerous additional cases that have not been documented. These prisoners include any actual or suspected opponent of the government, including politicians and journalists, anyone caught practising a religion outside the four recognised by the state, and anyone caught trying to evade or desert from national service conscription, which is frequently extended indefinitely – a system that constitutes forced labour. Political prisoners also include people caught trying to flee the country, failed asylum seekers forcibly returned from other countries, and family members of people who have successfully fled.

With no known exceptions, none of these political prisoners has ever been charged or tried, given access to a lawyer, or been brought before a judge or a judicial officer to assess the legality and necessity of the detention.

Hundreds, if not more, of these prisoners have been detained indefinitely and incommunicado in secret detention. In countless of these cases the detention amounts to enforced disappearance. In some cases the government has also refused to confirm or deny unofficial reports of deaths in custody.

The pervasive use of arbitrary arrest and detention without charge amounts to systematic violations of Eritrea's international human rights obligations.

Torture and other ill-treatment are commonplace, used for the purposes of punishment, for interrogation, and for coercion – adherents of unrecognised religions are tortured to force them to recant their religion.

Detention conditions in themselves amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment. Detainees are frequently held in underground cells or in metal shipping containers, often in desert locations and subject to extremes of temperature.

In light of the severity of the human rights situation in Eritrea, Amnesty International urges the Human Rights Council to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur; the Eritrean government to provide her access to the country; and all countries to support and facilitate the Special Rapporteur's fulfilment of the mandate.

Thank you Mr. President.