

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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**UN Human Rights Council
Twenty-eighth session, 2-27 March 2015**

Item 4: Interactive dialogue with Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea (oral update)

Mr. President,

Human rights continue to be systematically violated in Eritrea. Thousands of individuals are arbitrarily detained in harsh conditions, without charge or trial, for exercising their rights to freedom of opinion and expression, to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief and to conscientious objection to military service, for attempting to flee repression or in the place of family members who have fled. National service is compulsory and frequently extended for indefinite periods. This amounts to forced labour as both the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea and most recently the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women have recognised.¹

Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment are widespread, in violation of Eritrea's human rights obligations, including under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, to which it acceded on 25 September 2014.

In the face of such repression, thousands of Eritreans continue to flee the country every month. Last year, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported a dramatic increase in the numbers of Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers in Sudan, Ethiopia and Europe. States must continue to provide protection to those fleeing Eritrea and ensure that the principle of *non-refoulement* is respected. Asylum-seekers forcibly returned to Eritrea have been arbitrarily arrested, detained without charge and subjected to torture and ill-treatment, according to testimonies received by Amnesty International.²

Mr. President,

Restrictions on the exchange of information and the risk of reprisals against those critical of the government make it extremely difficult for individuals to speak out about their experiences in Eritrea. The Commission of Inquiry has an important opportunity not only to bring to light the stories of victims of human rights violations in the country, but also to lay groundwork for justice, truth and reparation, including guarantees of non-recurrence.

Amnesty International looks forward to the Commission of Inquiry's written report later this year and encourages the Commission to propose follow-up measures to the recommendations in that report.

Thank you.

¹ A/HRC/26/45, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth, 13 May 2014, paras 69-76; CEDAW/C/ERI/CO/5, Concluding observations on the fourth and fifth periodic reports of Eritrea, adopted by the Committee at its sixtieth session (16 February – 6 March 2015), paras 8(a) and 32.

² According to Amnesty International's monitoring, asylum-seekers have been forcibly returned to Eritrea from, *inter alia*, Egypt, Germany, Israel, Libya, Malta, Sweden, Sudan and the United Kingdom.