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Item 4: Human rights situations that require the Council's attention
Oral intervention in interactive dialogue with Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea

Delivered by Patrizia Scannella – **Video link:** <http://goo.gl/ltmoC3> (statement number 25)

Amnesty International welcomes the Special Rapporteur's report and her focus on national service. A large proportion of the adult population of Eritrea is currently engaged in national service, which is mandatory for men and women between the ages of 18 and 50. While the service period is supposed to be 18 months, this is frequently extended indefinitely. All schoolchildren are required to complete their final year of schooling at Sawa military camp, which results in children being conscripted into military service. Children as young as 15 and 16 years old have been conscripted through this system.

Exemptions on the grounds of conscientious objection to military service are not allowed. Conscripts have no choice in the nature of the work they are required to do. In addition to military service, many former conscripts report that they were assigned to construction projects or work in the agricultural sector.

As highlighted by the Special Rapporteur, this system of indefinite, involuntary conscription amounts to forced labour and is a human rights violation.¹ It also provides a context for further violations, including violent methods to enforce conscription, detention without charge or trial for evading or deserting national service, and detention of and reprisals against their family members. Those detained have often been subjected to torture or other ill-treatment.

Amnesty International calls on Eritrea to:

- Bring an end to indefinite, involuntary conscription for national service;
- Ensure that no-one younger than 18 is conscripted; and
- Make provision for conscientious objection to military service.

Amnesty International is concerned that the international community's failure to enforce the decision of the 2002 Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission continues to be used in Eritrean government rhetoric as a justification for indefinite conscription and other pervasive violations of the human rights of all Eritreans.

With serious violations being committed with impunity, the ongoing need for the work of the Special Rapporteur is undeniable. The Council should renew the mandate at this session.

Amnesty International urges the Eritrean government to cooperate fully with the mandate-holder and invite her to visit the country, and other Governments to allow her visit their countries to meet with Eritrean refugees and migrants.

Thank you Mr. President.

¹ Article 6(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966; Article 8(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966; Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment 18. See also ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour, 1930; and ILO Convention No. 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labour, 1957.