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ORAL STATEMENT

Item 2: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Eritrea

ERITREA MUST END THE SYSTEMATIC USE OF UNLAWFUL DETENTIONS AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

UN Human Rights Council
Forty-ninth regular session
28 February – 1 April 2022

Mr. President,

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his update.

Patriarch Abune Antonios, the former head of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, was arrested in January 2006 after criticising the Eritrean government for detaining people, including priests, without due process. Amnesty International considered him to be a prisoner of conscience and joined his devoted followers, family and wider Eritrean human rights movement in campaigning for his release.

On February 9th 2022, Patriarch Abune Antonios died after 16 years in unlawful detention.

His death reminds us of the country's most high-profile journalists and politicians who were unlawfully detained in 2001 as a part of a wider crackdown on government critics. We have no idea where they are or if they are still alive.

His death reminds us of Ciham Ali – an Eritrean-American woman who was unlawfully detained in Eritrea in 2012 after trying to flee the country. She was just 15 years old at the time. We have no idea where she is or if she still is alive.

His death reminds us of Berhane Abrehe, former finance minister who was unlawfully detained in 2018 after publicly challenging President Isaias Afwerki to a televised public debate to discuss the suffering he said the president had caused Eritreans. We have no idea where he is or if he still alive.

His death reminds us of the countless people who have disappeared into the Eritrean prison system whose fate we and their loved ones might never know.

Mr. President,

We urge the Eritrean government to end the systematic use of unlawful detentions and enforced disappearances, to clarify the fate of all victims of enforced disappearance and immediately and to unconditionally release all those in unlawful detention. We also urge Eritrea, as a member of this Council, to facilitate a visit by the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea without further delay.

Thank you.