



## **Eritrean Movement for Democracy & Human Rights**

Your Excellency, distinguished guests and Civil Society Actors

Your excellency Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights along with partner organisations thank you for giving us the platform. EMDHR was created in 2003 and registered as an NPO in 2004 in South Africa. We have worked in highlighting the ongoing human rights violations in Eritrea, refugees and supporting Eritrean NGOs. We also represent our Eritrean partner organisations. EMDHR has previously supported a UPR report in conjunction with CIVICUS.

Whilst Eritrea supported a number of the recommendations made in 2019, the sad reality is that since the last UPR review on Eritrea there has been no change on the human rights situation. If anything there has been further deterioration in the country in part due to the conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. Whilst the recommendations made were constructive, unfortunately there have been a number of factors that have contributed to the recommendations not being implemented. Firstly, there is no political will on the part of the Eritrean Government to improve the lives of the Eritrean people. By all accounts one can presume the contrary. The recommendations were quite general and there were no clear action points given, means of measuring progress with specific timelines. There needs to be specific targets met for given recommendations.

I will be raising four thematic issues during the pre-session:

1. Freedom of Association, Assembly and Expression
2. Freedom of Religion
3. Human Rights Violations (Indefinite National Service)
4. Freedom of Civil Society Organisations



1. Freedom of association, assembly and expression have been vastly curtailed in Eritrea. All aspects of society are strictly controlled by the state in which people are unable to gather, form unions to fight for their rights, freedom of religion, freedom of political participation, the freedom to form organisations and freedom of the press. In the absence of all of this it is difficult to gather information, report and continually monitor the human rights situation across the country. Eritrea in 2023 was the 7 highest country in the world with jailed reporters and the highest number in Africa. CPJ - <https://cpj.org/reports/2024/01/2023-prison-census-jailed-journalist-numbers-near-record-high-israel-imprisonments-spike/>

2. The Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church Abune Antonios who was forcibly removed by the Government and had been put under house arrest since 2006, died 9 February 2022 at the age of 93. The bishop of the Catholic Church, his Holiness Abune Mengisteab Tesfamariam was detained for over two months without due process and then released December 2022. Clinics run by the Catholic Church which were serving thousands of people were abruptly shut down. Members of the banned evangelicals are still being arrested and asked to pay bail money amounting to NAK 300,000 (= \$20,000).

3. The indefinite national service continues unabated with young Eritreans continuing to flee as a result. There has been no investigation and recourse to justice for those young Eritreans who have suffered human rights abuses during military and national service. Eritreans stuck in indefinite national service have meant that their dignity and human rights are abrogated as they are basically used as slave labourers and do not have the freedom to determine their own lives. According to the Global Slavery Index in 2023 Eritrea had the second highest prevalence of slavery in the world.

From 2020 - 2022 Eritrean families whose children fled or hid not to go to the war in Tigray were punished by being locked out of their houses. This included women, children, pregnant women, elderly and the sick. Mothers were left out on the street with their children, the sheer cruelty is difficult to fathom. The Eritrean Government continues to use repression and fear as a means of controlling society.

4. Civil society organisations are an integral component in any society and are the gatekeepers between the state and the people and hence play an important role in ensuring human rights, legality, freedom of expression, assembly and association. However, since the Proclamation of 145/ 2005, independent civil society organisations



have ceased to operate inside Eritrea. As a result of this the Eritrean people continue to suffer in silence with their basic human rights denied.

The situation in Eritrea is untenable and business cannot continue as normal. The implementation of the 1997 constitution is the only means of ensuring justice and having their human rights & dignity upheld.

**Therefore, we make the following recommendations to the Government of Eritrea:**

1. The 145/2005 proclamation to be repealed and civil society space to be opened,  
Aim: To enable independent civil society and media to flourish  
Measure: Have consultations with Eritrean civil society, create mechanisms of registering civil society organisations. 1. Repeal proclamation 145/2005 with Immediate effect, 2. Set a firm date to begin consultation with civil society 3. Start Creating a body to register and monitor civil society organisations.
2. Ensure that National Service is limited to 18 months  
Aim: To ensure it is not indefinite and that the human rights of Eritrean conscripts is upheld  
Measure: Law/Proclamation limiting national service to 18 months 2. Create an independent mechanism body to monitor National Service.3. The release of all those who have been unlawfully detained 4. Compensation & ongoing support of Various kinds to all those whose human rights have been violated
3. To permit freedom of religion  
Aim: Ensure freedom of assembly and for people to practise their religion without fear or prejudice.  
Measure: 1, Release all religious scholars and religious figures 2. Government to Stop interfering in matters of religion 3. Ensure minority religions are equally protected

We thank your excellency