

Human Rights Watch Statement
Item 6 - UPR outcome report of Eritrea
13th Session of the HRC - March 17th, 2010

Human Rights Watch welcomes Eritrea's commitment to continued engagement with the UN human rights bodies, including the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. The UPR represented a critical opportunity to foster positive change in the policies of the Eritrean Government, and many statements highlighted the gravity of the human rights situation in the country. In this regard, Human Rights Watch urges Eritrea to take immediate and meaningful steps in the implementation of the UPR outcome and to demonstrate its willingness to engage by issuing a standing invitation to mandate-holders to visit the country, as recommended by many states.

As recommended by Ghana (para. 68), Eritrea should take immediate steps to implement its constitution, which contains strong protections for core civil and political rights including the right to life, liberty and freedom of expression, association, assembly and religion. The reality shows a entirely different picture: Eritreans continue to be arbitrarily detained and subjected to torture, ill treatment and lengthy pre-charge detention on the basis of their perceived political opinion or religious affiliation.

As Human Rights Watch has documented in 2009, scores of Eritreans experience arbitrary detention and ill treatment in connection with their unwillingness to perform indefinite military service or their efforts to declare themselves as conscientious objectors to military service. Eritrea should take immediate steps to charge and bring to trial or release all detainees. It should also accept and act upon the recommendations to establish a legal right to conscientious objection and ensure that those individuals who do not wish to continue military service following the mandatory period of eighteen months are permitted to demobilize.

Human Rights Watch remains deeply concerned by Eritrea's detention of its citizens in both secret and known detention facilities without access to appropriate medical care, lawyers or family members. The lack of any independent monitoring of these facilities remains a serious problem. Human Rights Watch strongly recommends that Eritrea immediately implement the

recommendation of Mexico, Slovenia and Australia to permit access to all detention facilities by independent, international monitors.

The need to end the impunity of those individuals in the security forces who commit serious crimes should also be an urgent priority. As recommended by Australia, Switzerland and Chile, Eritrea should investigate and prosecute those responsible for such crimes. It should cooperate with the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances and respond to its communications, as noted by the Netherlands, and seek support from the international community in order to implement needed reforms to relevant legislation and its judicial system, where necessary.

Eritrea's unwillingness to allow independent voices, including media and civil society, to establish and pursue their respective rights to free expression and association remains a fundamental obstacle to accountability and democratic progress in the country. Reversing these alarming policies should be seen as a top priority throughout the implementation of the UPR outcome.

Violations of freedom of opinion and worship remain commonplace. Eritrea could begin meaningful efforts to address these concerns by rescinding its ban on religions (beyond the four officially recognized religions); ceasing its practice of arresting individuals who seek to meet and practice other faiths; and ending discrimination against Jehovah's Witnesses.