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## 2009 Human Rights Report: Eritrea

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### 2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

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Eritrea, with a population of an estimated 5.5 million, is a one-party state that became independent in 1993 when citizens voted for independence from Ethiopia, following 30 years of civil war. The People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), previously known as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, is the sole political party and has controlled the country since 1991. The country's president, Isaias Afwerki, who heads the PFDJ and the armed forces, dominated the country, and the government continued to postpone presidential and legislative elections; the latter have never been held. The border dispute with Ethiopia continued, despite international efforts at demarcation. The situation was used by the government to justify severe restrictions on civil liberties. Although civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces, consistent and systemic gross human rights violations persisted unabated at the government's behest.

Human rights abuses included abridgement of citizens' right to change their government through a democratic process; unlawful killings by security forces; torture and beating of prisoners, sometimes resulting in death; abuse and torture of national service evaders, some of whom reportedly died from their injuries while in detention; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention, including of national service evaders and their family members; executive interference in the judiciary and the use of a special court system to limit due process; and infringement on privacy rights, including roundups of young men and women for national service, and the arrest and detention of the family members of service evaders. The government severely restricted freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, and religion. The government also limited freedom of movement and travel for citizens in the national service, foreign residents, employees of diplomatic missions, the UN, and humanitarian and development agencies. Restrictions continued on the activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Female genital mutilation (FGM) was widespread, and societal abuse and discrimination against women, members of the Kunama ethnic group, homosexuals, and persons with HIV/AIDS were problems. There were limitations on worker rights, including forced labor.

The government acted as a principal source and conduit for arms to antigovernment, extremist, and insurgent groups in Somalia, according to a June report issued by the UN Munitions Monitoring Group.

### RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

#### a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

In August opposition Web sites released a report claiming that in 2002 the government executed Berhane Gebregzabhier, one of the 11 members of the PFDJ National Assembly who had been held in solitary confinement since 2001 for opposing the president. The execution was carried out based on the recommendations of Naizghi Kiflu, a former presidential advisor believed to currently reside in London. An additional eight persons died in prison from natural causes, according to the report released by opposition Web sites (see section 1.d.). The nine deceased were part of what was known as the G-15, a group of high-ranking political activists who regularly pushed the president for democratic reform during the country's formative years. The government arrested 11 members of the G-15 in September 2001; one member recanted his statements, and three were out of the country.

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The government continued to authorize the use of lethal force against individuals resisting or attempting to flee during military searches for deserters and draft evaders, and the practice reportedly resulted in deaths during the year. Several persons detained for evading national service died after harsh treatment by security forces. There were reports that individuals were severely beaten and killed during roundups of young men and women for national service.

It was unknown if the government continued the practice of summary executions and of shooting individuals on sight near the Djibouti border, allegedly for attempting to flee military service, as was the case in 2008. In June 2008 the international media reported that the Eritrean military shot at their own defecting soldiers who broke rank along the Djibouti border, instigating the Djibouti-Eritrea border conflict. Soldiers who broke rank claimed that the government issued a "shoot to kill" proclamation for deserters and escapees.

There were no reports of deaths from mistreatment/hazing of conscripts or other soldiers. There were numerous reports that persons detained because of their religious affiliation died from security force abuse. The government did not investigate or prosecute any report of security force abuse.

According to the government Commission for Coordination with the UN Peacekeeping Mission, an estimated three million land mines and unexploded ordnance remained from the 30-year war and the 1998–2000 conflict with Ethiopia. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that opposition groups laid new mines. The Eritrean Demining Authority halted demining activities in the Temporary Security Zone between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 2008 after the UN Mine Action Committee departed from Eritrea. Currently, the UN Development Programme supports explosive ordnance disposal and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) funds mine risk education for school children and families in mine-impacted communities.

#### b. Disappearance

Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers repatriated from other countries during the year reportedly disappeared. In January the government of Egypt repatriated several hundred Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers, all of whom were returned to their families, according to the government. Nevertheless, there were numerous reports from family members of missing individuals, mostly young men and women who had not completed national service.

In June 2008, 1,200 Eritreans were repatriated from Egypt, many of whom remained missing at year's end. In May 2008 German immigration authorities returned two Eritrean nationals, neither of whom had been seen since their arrival in Asmara.

The whereabouts of at least 15 journalists and several employees of diplomatic missions arrested by the government in 2001 remained unknown.

#### c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law and the ratified but unimplemented constitution prohibit torture; however, there were numerous reports that security forces resorted to torture and beatings of prisoners, particularly during interrogations. There were credible reports that several military conscripts died following such treatment. Security forces severely mistreated and beat army deserters, draft evaders, persons attempting to flee the country without travel documents and exit permits, and members of certain religious groups. Security forces subjected deserters and draft evaders to such disciplinary actions as prolonged sun exposure in temperatures of up to 120 degrees Fahrenheit; the binding of hands, elbows, and feet for extended periods; and suspension from trees for extended periods. No known action was taken during the year to punish perpetrators of torture and abuse.

There were numerous reports, corroborated by prison escapees, that torture was widely used in detention facilities. For example, authorities suspended prisoners from trees with their arms tied behind their backs, a technique known as "almaz" (diamond). Authorities also placed prisoners face down with their hands tied to their feet, a technique known as the "helicopter."

According to Human Rights Watch, refugees from the country reported that female conscripts in national service were often raped by their supervisors. There were also reports that military officials tortured foreign fishermen captured in Eritrean waters.

#### Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions remained harsh and in some cases life threatening. Severe overcrowding was common. There were reports that prisoners were held in underground cells or in shipping containers with little or no ventilation in extreme temperatures. The shipping containers were reportedly not large enough to allow all of those incarcerated to lie down at the same time. Other prisoners were held in cement-lined underground bunkers with no ventilation. Up to 200 prisoners were held in each bunker, and some prisoners passed out from the extreme heat.

During the year Wi'a Military Camp closed its prison. Religious prisoners were relocated to the desert prison Metier while others were taken to a prison just outside of Dekemhare.

While statistics were unavailable, there were some deaths in prison due to illness and poor health care.

There were several unofficial detention centers, most located in military camps and used as overflow detention centers following mass arrests and roundups. There were reports that detention center conditions for persons temporarily held for evading military service were also harsh and life threatening. Allegations from various sources suggested there may have been hundreds of such detainees. Draft evaders were reportedly sent to the Wi'a military camp, where typically they were beaten. Some were held as long as two years before being reassigned to their units. At one detention facility outside Asmara, authorities continued to hold detainees in an underground hall with no access to light or ventilation and sometimes in very crowded conditions.

Use of psychological torture was common, according to former inmates. One common technique was for the interrogator to constantly open and close the door of the cell, as if the prisoner was going to be taken for interrogation. Denial of food, medical treatment, and family access were also used to punish prisoners. Some prisoners were released after close friends or relatives offered their homes or other property as bond.

Deaths occurred in prisons and detention centers as a result of inadequate nutrition, disease, and denial of medical care. For example, numerous deaths occurred at the Wi'a Military Camp prison due to widespread disease and lack of medical care. In August a meningitis outbreak at a prison in Massawa reportedly resulted in the deaths of dozens of inmates.

The government did not release the total number of prisoners and detainees.

Those imprisoned were often interrogated about religious affiliation and were asked to identify members of nonapproved religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses.

During the year the government did not permit the ICRC or any local human rights organizations to monitor prison conditions. Since the shutdown of the repatriation program during the year, the government also denied the ICRC access to Ethiopian prisoners of war detained in the country.

Although there was a juvenile detention center in Asmara, juveniles frequently were held with adults in prisons and detention centers. Juveniles as young as 15 were tried as adults. Pretrial detainees were not always separated from convicted prisoners.

Authorities generally permitted convicted criminals in prisons three visits per week by family members; however, persons detained, arrested, or convicted for reasons of national security or for evading national service were denied family visits.

#### d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law and unimplemented constitution prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention; however, arbitrary arrest and detention remained chronic problems.

##### Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

Police were officially responsible for maintaining internal security, and the army was responsible for external security; however, the government could call on the armed forces, the reserves, and demobilized soldiers to meet either domestic or external security requirements. Agents of the National Security Office, which reports to the Office of the President, were responsible for detaining persons suspected of threatening national security. The military had the authority to arrest and detain civilians. Generally police did not have a role in cases involving national security, but they were heavily involved in rounding up individuals evading national service.

Police, who often were conscripted, were poorly paid, and corruption was a problem. During the year there were reports of police and other security forces committing crimes to supplement their income, including breaking into homes to confiscate jewelry, money, and food. Police typically used their influence as government officials to assist friends and family, such as in facilitating family members' release from prison. There were reports that police demanded bribes to release detainees and that military forces accepted money to smuggle citizens out of the country. There were no mechanisms to address allegations of official abuse, and impunity was a problem.

During the year the police, military, and internal security arrested and detained persons without due process and often used violence. Police forcibly arrested individuals on the street who were unable to present identification documents. Those in the government national service were required to present "movement papers" issued by their offices or departments authorizing their presence in a particular location. Those persons who did not present "movement papers" were arrested.

##### Arrest Procedures and Treatment While in Detention

The law stipulates that detainees must be brought before a judge within 48 hours of arrest and may not be held more than 28 days without being charged with a crime. In practice authorities often detained suspects for much longer periods. The law stipulates that unless there is a "crime in progress," police must conduct an investigation and obtain a warrant prior to making an arrest. In cases involving national security, this process may be waived. In practice very few individuals were arrested with a warrant. Authorities did not promptly inform detainees of charges against them and often changed the charges during detention. Detainees in prisons often did not have access to counsel or appear before a judge.

Incommunicado detention was widespread, although detainees in police stations generally had access to legal representation and family members. Authorities provided indigent detainees with counsel on an irregular basis. There was a functioning bail system, except for persons charged with national security crimes or crimes that could carry the death penalty.

Security force personnel detained individuals for evading national service and on other unspecified national security charges. Numerous detainees were arrested even if they had valid papers showing that they had completed, or were exempt from, national service. In practice, most detainees were informally charged with issues relating to national service, effectively allowing authorities to incarcerate citizens indefinitely.

Security forces also continued to detain and arrest the parents and spouses of individuals who evaded national service or fled the country (see section 1.f.).

Unlike in previous years, there were very few reports of mass arrests known as "round-ups," in which citizens were held without charge indefinitely while authorities sorted out their military service paperwork in search of deserters. Many citizens believed that this was because the government had already thoroughly scoured the major cities numerous times and caught most deserters.

The government does not recognize dual nationality, and during the year security forces arbitrarily arrested citizens holding other nationalities on national security charges. There were reports that plainclothes agents of the National Security Office entered homes without warrants and arrested occupants.

Numerous reports also indicated that persons with connections to high-level officials instigated the arrest of individuals with whom they had personal vendettas. In many instances these individuals were never formally charged.

The government continued to arbitrarily arrest members of nonregistered religious groups and persons who criticized the government (see sections 2.a. and 2.c.). There were reports that the government continued to hold without charge numerous members of the Eritrean Liberation Front, an armed opposition group that fought against Ethiopia during the struggle for independence.

Opposition Web sites reported during the year that nine of the 11 PFDJ National Assembly members who were detained in 2001 and 2002 were reported to have died while in prison. Eight of the prisoners died from lack of medical treatment for diabetes, bladder and kidney infections, asthma, and other physical ailments. One prisoner, Berhane Gebregzabhier, was reportedly executed by the government per the recommendation of Naizghi Kiflu, a former presidential advisor.

At least four Eritrean diplomats arrested in previous years, including former ambassador to China Ermias Debassai Papayo, remained in detention, as did Aster Yohannes, wife of former foreign minister Petros Solomon. Two citizens who worked for a foreign embassy have remained in detention without charge since 2001. Several citizens employed with international and local NGOs remained in detention without charge as a result of a massive round-up in August 2008.

The government held numerous other detainees, including an unknown number of the NGO employees detained in an August 2008 round-up (see section 5). The detainees included an unknown number of persons suspected of antigovernment speech or of association with the 11 former PFDJ members arrested in 2001. Suspected Islamic radicals or suspected terrorists also remained in detention without charge. Some had been detained for more than 10 years. These detainees reportedly did not have access to legal counsel and were not brought before a judge. The government continued to detain the deposed Orthodox patriarch (see section 2.c.). There were widespread reports many detainees were released without going to trial.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law and unimplemented constitution provide for an independent judiciary; however, the judiciary was weak and subject to executive control. Judicial corruption remained a problem. The judicial process was influenced by patronage of former fighters who in many cases were judges themselves. Executive control of the judiciary continued; the Office of the President served as a clearinghouse for citizens' petitions to the courts or acted for the courts as arbitrators or facilitators in civil matters. The judiciary suffered from a lack of trained personnel, inadequate funding, and poor infrastructure that limited the government's ability to grant accused persons a speedy and fair trial. Public trials were held, but no cases involving individuals detained for national security or political reasons were brought to trial. The drafting into national service of many civilian court administrators, defendants, judges, lawyers, and others involved in the legal system continued to have a significant negative impact on the judiciary. The government had not issued licenses to lawyers seeking to enter private practice for 10 years.

The text of the constitution was completed and ratified by the National Assembly in 1997. It contains provisions intended to promote fair trials; however, the constitution had not been implemented by year's end.

The judicial system consists of civil courts and "special courts." The civil court system includes community courts, regional courts, and the High Court, which also serves as an appellate court. Minor infractions involving sums of less than approximately 110,000 nakfa (\$7,300) are brought to community courts. The regional court is generally the court of the first instance and has civil, criminal, and Shari'a (Islamic law) benches. The Shari'a bench adjudicates family law for followers of Islam only. Decisions rendered by any of the benches at the regional court can be appealed to the High Court. The High Court is primarily an appellate court but also serves as the court of first instance for cases involving murder, rape, and other serious felonies. The High Court has civil, criminal, and Shari'a benches. There also is a five-judge bench that hears final appeals in lieu of a Supreme Court.

The executive-controlled special courts issue directives to other courts regarding administrative matters, although their domain was supposed to be restricted to criminal cases involving capital offenses, theft, embezzlement, and corruption. The Office of the Attorney General decides which cases are to be tried by a special court. No lawyers practice in the special courts. The judges serve as the prosecutors and may request that individuals involved in the cases present their positions. The special courts, which do not permit defense counsel or the right of appeal, allowed the executive branch to mete out punishment without regard for due process. Most trials in special courts were not open to the public.

Many civilian and special court judges are former senior military officers with no formal legal training. They generally based their decisions on "conscience" without reference to the law. There was no limitation on punishment, although the special courts did not hand down capital punishment sentences during the year. The attorney general allowed special courts to retry civilian court cases, including those decided by the High Court, thereby subjecting defendants to double jeopardy. In rare instances appeals made to the Office of the President reportedly resulted in special courts rehearing certain cases.

Most citizens' only contact with the legal system was with the traditional community courts. In these courts judges heard civil cases, while magistrates versed in criminal law heard criminal cases. Customary tribunals were sometimes used to adjudicate local civil and criminal cases. The Ministry of Justice offered training in alternative dispute resolution to handle some civil and criminal cases.

The military court has jurisdiction over penal cases brought against members of the armed forces in addition to crimes committed by and against members of the armed forces. Presiding judges are senior military officers, and the court has higher and lower levels, depending on the seriousness of the offense. With nearly 200,000 enlisted in the armed forces, the military courts have a significant and unregulated importance in the country.

Shari'a for family and succession cases may be applied when both litigants in civil cases are Muslims. In these cases the sentences imposed may not involve physical punishment.

#### Trial Procedures

The law and unimplemented constitution provide specific rights to defendants in the regular court system. Defendants have the right to be present and to consult with an attorney; however, many defendants lacked the resources to retain a lawyer, and government legal aid was limited to defendants accused of serious crimes punishable by more than 10 years in prison. Only in the High Court did defendants have the right to confront and question witnesses, present evidence, gain access to government-held evidence, appeal a decision, and enjoy the presumption of innocence; these rights were upheld in practice.

Rural courts followed customary law rather than constitutional law and were headed by rural elders or elected officials. Smaller cases in rural areas were encouraged to be reconciled outside the court system, while more substantial cases were reserved for the courts. These procedures did not apply in the special courts. Trials in rural courts were open to the public but were not heard by a jury; they were heard by a panel of judges.

#### Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no confirmed reports of political prisoners; however, several hundred individuals were detained beginning in 2001 for political reasons. Many were perceived to have ties to political dissidents or were believed to have spoken against government actions. Most of these detainees had not been tried and did not have access to legal counsel. The ICRC was not authorized to visit these detainees, and no information was available on their condition or circumstances of detention.

#### Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

There are no civil judicial procedures for individuals claiming human rights violations by the government. For the majority of citizens there were few remedies available for enforcing domestic court orders; however, persons affiliated with the executive branch, former fighters, and persons with wealth could use their influence with the court to secure civil remedies before the law.

#### f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law and unimplemented constitution prohibit such actions; however, the government did not respect these rights in practice.

The government deployed military and police throughout the country, using roadblocks, street sweeps, and house-to-house searches to find deserters and draft evaders. Security forces continued to detain and arrest parents of individuals who evaded national service duties or fled the country, along with their family members; there were reports that such parents were either fined 50,000 nakfa (\$3,333) or forced to turn their children in to the government. Government officials entered households and confiscated the property and livestock of draft evaders. Some security officials accepted bribes to aid draft evaders in crossing the border.

There were reports of security forces arresting persons whose expatriate family members did not pay their extraterritorial income tax.

There were reports that security forces targeted gatherings of unregistered religious groups, regularly searched their homes, and detained their members. There were also reports that the government sometimes seized the property of registered religious groups (see section 2.c.).

The government monitored mail, e-mail, text messages, and telephone calls without obtaining warrants as required by law. Government informers were believed to be present throughout the country. Many citizens believed the government particularly monitored cell phones; the government requires a permit for use of SIM cards, necessary for operating and storing information in mobile phones. The government allowed only one SIM card per person, although many citizens generally had more. The government did not allow citizens in military service to have SIM cards. There were reports of the government arresting those who rented their cell phones to others.

There were multiple reports that military and government officials seized residences and businesses belonging to private citizens and religious organizations and subsequently housed the families of senior military officers or government officials in the properties, used them for government or military functions, or reassigned ownership to government and military officials.

In 2008 the government demanded that departing NGOs hand over financial and reporting documents to government officials. While membership in the PFDJ, the government's only sanctioned political party, was not mandatory for all citizens, the government coerced membership for certain categories of individuals, particularly those occupying government positions or assigned through national service to serve in government institutions. All citizens were forced to attend PFDJ indoctrination meetings irrespective of membership, and there were reports of threats to withhold the ration cards of those who did not attend. There were reports that similar meetings were mandatory for Eritrean communities abroad, with names of those not in attendance being reported to government officials. Citizens who did not attend reportedly were harassed. Officials also collected biographical and contact information on Eritrean residents living abroad.

Eritrean officials reportedly monitored refugee camps in neighboring countries, such as Kenya and Sudan, and discouraged refugees from engaging in political activity.

## Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

### a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law and unimplemented constitution provide for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the government severely restricted these rights in practice. Citizens did not have the right to criticize their government in public or in private, and some who did were arrested or detained. The private press remained banned, and most independent journalists remained in detention or fled the country, which effectively prevented any public and media criticism of the government. All journalists practiced self-censorship due to fear of government reprisal.

The government attempted to impede criticism and took reprisals against persons who criticized government officials or policies. During the year persons were arrested for publicly complaining about poverty. The government monitored meetings within the country and abroad. The government also continued to forbid free speech. In an October interview with Reuters, the president stated that he would not allow independent media to operate in Eritrea.

The government controlled all media, which included three newspapers, three radio stations, and two television stations. The law does not allow private ownership of broadcast or other media. The government banned the import of foreign publications without prior approval; however, individuals were permitted to purchase satellite dishes and subscribe to international media. The government had to approve publications distributed by religious or international organizations before their release, and the government continued to restrict the right of religious media to comment on politics or

government policies. The press law forbids reprinting of articles from banned publications. The government also required diplomatic missions to submit all press releases for approval before their publication in the government media.

Unlike in 2008, the government permitted only one reporter representing a foreign news organization, Reuters, to operate in the country; however, the government did not grant permission for the reporter to travel outside the capital. In February 2008 the government created administrative obstacles for the Agence-France Presse (AFP) international journalist resulting in his forced departure. AFP had not been allowed to return to the country since. The president occasionally conducted interviews with foreign news agencies invited specifically for the interview.

The Swedish reporter who was held by the government for nearly four years, released for medical treatment in 2005, and detained again a few days later, remained in detention without charge at year's end. In a May 29 televised interview, the president stated he had no intention of releasing the journalist or providing him with a trial. At year's end the government had not responded to the Swedish government's calls for the journalist's release.

Journalists were often subject to arrest, harassment, intimidation, and violence. For example, in January the government conducted a raid on Radio Bana, one of three government-owned radio stations, and arrested all employees present, including one foreign journalist who was later released. It was unclear how many employees of Radio Bana remained in detention at year's end.

Although libel or national security laws were not used to suppress criticism directly, citizens remained fearful of speaking out against the government or its policies. In both its report to the UN during its Universal Periodic Review and in interviews, the government repeatedly implied that national security concerns were at the root of suppressing free speech and criticism.

According to Reporters Without Borders, at least 30 journalists and two media workers remained in detention at year's end, including Eri-TV journalists Ahmed "Bahja" Idris, Johnny Hisabu, Senait Tesfay, Fathia Khaled, and Amir Ibrahim; Radio Dimtsi Hafash employees Daniel Mussie and Temesghen Abay; and Yemane Haile of the Eritrean News Agency. All those detained, except Hisabu, who was held in a detention center in Barentu, were reportedly held in a police-run complex in Asmara known as Agip. Included among the 30 were at least 15 local journalists who were arrested in 2001 for political reasons.

Some of the nine Ministry of Information journalists arrested in 2006 were released in 2007, and others remained in detention at year's end.

Radio stations opposed to the government were founded by former journalists who fled the country during the 2001 crackdown. For example, Radio Assenna, created during the year, was founded in Europe by two former Eri-TV broadcasters.

#### Internet Freedom

There were no official restrictions on the use of the Internet; however, the government monitored Internet communications. The government monitored e-mail without obtaining warrants as required by law (see section 2.a.). All Internet service users were required to use one of the three Internet service providers owned, either directly or through high-ranking PFDJ party members, by the government.

The government also discouraged citizens from viewing Web sites known to be antigovernment by continuously labeling the sites and their developers as saboteurs of the government. Many citizens expressed fear of arrest if the government caught them viewing such sites.

According to International Telecommunication Union statistics for 2008, approximately 1.8 percent of the country's inhabitants used the Internet.

#### Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government restricted academic freedom, including restricting or censoring course content or curriculum, censoring or sanctioning academic personnel for their teachings, writing, or research, restricting academic travel or contact with other academics at home and abroad, intimidating academics into practicing self-censorship, and influencing academic appointments based on political affiliation.

In 2002 the government reorganized the University of Asmara, which effectively shut down the university's undergraduate programs. As a result, prospective students were not allowed to enroll in the university and instead were directed by the government to attend the Mai Nafhi Technical Institute. Students finishing high school were not permitted to choose their next course of study and were assigned to specific vocational programs based on their performance on the matriculation exam, but only those students completing military training at Sawa or receiving a medical waiver were allowed to take the exam. A few graduate-level programs remained at the university; however, the law school was effectively closed, as new students were not permitted to enroll.

The government denied exit visas to many students who wanted to study abroad. University academics who wished to travel abroad for further study or training were required to seek permission in advance from the university president and the government.

During the year the government censored, canceled, or closed films, art exhibits, and other cultural activities. For example, the government routinely monitored libraries and cultural centers maintained by foreign embassies, threatening censure of material and in some instances intimidating and harassing employees.

#### b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

##### Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The law and unimplemented constitution provide for freedom of assembly and association; however, the government did not permit either. For gatherings of more than three persons, the government required those assembling to obtain a permit, although this requirement was enforced sporadically.

There were no demonstrations during the year; the populace remained intimidated by the government.

During the year security forces disrupted public meetings and cultural gatherings. Security forces typically took photographs and recorded the names of participants and interrogated participants upon arrival and departure.

##### Freedom of Association

The law and unimplemented constitution provide for freedom of association; however, the government did not respect these rights.

The government did not allow the formation of any political parties other than the PFDJ. It also prohibited the formation of any associations or private organizations (see section 3).

#### c. Freedom of Religion

The law and unimplemented constitution provide for freedom of religion; however, the government restricted this right in practice. Only the four religious groups whose registrations had been approved by the government (Orthodox Christian,

Muslim, Catholic, and Lutheran) were allowed to meet legally during the year. Security forces continued to abuse, arrest, detain, and torture members of nonregistered churches; at times such abuse resulted in death.

During the year there continued to be reports that security forces used extreme physical abuse such as bondage, heat exposure, and beatings to punish those detained for their religious beliefs. Numerous detainees were reportedly required to sign statements repudiating their faith or agreeing not to practice it as a condition for release. There also continued to be reports that relatives were asked to sign for detainees who refused to sign such documents.

Authorities continued to detain, harass, and abuse hundreds of followers of various unregistered churches (mostly Protestant) during the year. Many of those detained were held in military prisons for not having performed required national military service. Some were held for refusing to belong to a specific religious group. Several pastors and dozens of women were among the imprisoned. Several were released after recanting their faith; however, many refused to recant and continued to be detained in civilian and military detention facilities across the country. While some were detained for short periods of time and released, approximately 3,000 individuals remained in detention at year's end because of their religious affiliation, according to the NGO Compass Direct.

The government also continued to harass, detain, and discriminate against Jehovah's Witnesses because of their refusal, on religious grounds, to vote in the independence referendum and the refusal of some to perform military duty. This discrimination persisted even though Jehovah's Witnesses stated a willingness to perform nonmilitary national service, such as working in hospitals.

Although members of several religious groups, including Muslims, reportedly were imprisoned in past years for failure to participate in national military service, the government singled out Jehovah's Witnesses for harsher treatment than that received by followers of other faiths for similar actions. In the past the government dismissed members of Jehovah's Witnesses from the civil service, and many were evicted from, or not allowed to occupy, government housing. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses frequently were denied passports and exit visas, and some had their identity cards revoked or did not receive them at all.

During the year the government arrested the wives and daughters of male members of Jehovah's Witnesses arrested in 2008; the practice sometimes resulted in the incarceration of entire families. An estimated 65 members of Jehovah's Witnesses were detained at year's end.

In January security forces arrested 30 young Muslims in Asmara believed to be influential in their communities; the 30, who were charged with "radicalism," were released in July and ordered to shave their beards.

The government also continued to monitor, harass, threaten, and arrest members of the four "compliant" religious groups (Faith Mission Church, Seventh-day Adventists, Baha'i Faith, and the Mehrete Yesus Evangelical Church), whose religious services it had not approved.

There were no developments in the following 2008 cases: the arrest of 19 members of Jehovah's Witnesses; the December arrest of more than 17 leaders of "noncompliant" religious groups; the November arrests of more than 100 evangelical Christians; and the October detention of military trainees who protested the government's confiscation and burning of Bibles. It was unknown how many continued to be detained. It was unknown if the practice of burning Bibles from incoming military trainees continued as in previous years.

In May 2008 the government issued religious officials from the four recognized religious groups a set number of identity cards and exempted them from military service requirements. Officials who were not awarded a card were told to report immediately for military training. No such exemptions were provided during the year.

In 2008 there were reports of government officials, including the Eritrean ambassador to Kenya, Saleh Omer, being complicit in the physical abuse and torture of an Eritrean religious official in Nairobi. Ambassador Saleh Omer was also reportedly responsible for threatening church members and seizing church funds. There were additional reports of the government being responsible for the deposing of three former Orthodox priests in Nairobi.

The government effectively remained in charge of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. In 2006 the Holy Synod, under government pressure, deposed Patriarch Abune Antonios of the Eritrean Orthodox Church on charges that he had committed heresy and was no longer following church doctrine. The synod selected a new patriarch, Dioscoros. Deposed Patriarch Antonios remained under house arrest and at year's end continued to challenge the selection of Patriarch Dioscoros. The lay administrator appointed by the government in 2005 remained the de facto head of the church; the administrator was neither a member of the clergy nor an appointee of the patriarch, as required by the constitution of the Eritrean Orthodox Church.

The government continued to take possession of the weekly offerings given by parishioners to the Orthodox Church. The government-appointed lay administrator of the Orthodox Church claimed that the government used the money from the offerings to pay priests and provide alms for the poor.

The government prohibited political activity by religious groups and faith-based NGOs. The government's Office of Religious Affairs monitored compliance with this proscription. The government also encouraged discrimination against the nonapproved religious groups, reportedly distributing a memo in October 2008 discouraging neighborhoods from allowing these groups to use burial plots.

#### Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were negative societal attitudes toward members of nonregistered religious organizations. Some citizens approved of the strict official measures levied against unsanctioned churches, especially Pentecostal groups and Jehovah's Witnesses.

There was a very small Jewish population; there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

For a more detailed discussion, see the *2009 International Religious Freedom Report* at [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf).

#### d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The law and unimplemented constitution provide for freedom of movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation; however, the government restricted some of these rights in practice. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in assisting refugees who were not from Ethiopia. The government also cooperated with the UNHCR to provide protection and assistance to approximately 4,300 Somali and 100 Sudanese refugees. The government's Office of Refugee Affairs managed the refugee camps, providing hospitals, schools, and other resources. The government did not recognize Ethiopians as refugees and did not cooperate with the UNHCR on this issue.

While citizens could generally travel freely within the country and change their places of residence, the government restricted travel to some areas within the country, particularly along the borders with Sudan and Ethiopia. The government continually modified its requirements to obtain passports and exit visas, sometimes suspending passport or exit visa services without prior warning. Citizens participating in national service were often denied internal travel permits, passports, and exit visas. Many persons who previously were issued passports were not allowed to renew them, nor were they granted exit visas. Military police periodically set up roadblocks in Asmara and on roads between cities to find draft

evaders and deserters. Police also stopped persons on the street and forcibly detained those who were unable to present identification documents or movement papers showing they had permission to be in that area.

Citizens and some foreign nationals were required to obtain exit visas to depart the country. Persons routinely denied exit visas included men up to the age of 54, regardless of whether they had completed national service; women under the age of 47; members of Jehovah's Witnesses; and other persons out of favor with, or seen as critical of, the government. In 2006 the government began refusing to issue exit visas to children 11 years and older. The government also refused to issue exit visas to children, some as young as five years of age, either on the grounds that they were approaching the age of eligibility for national service or because their expatriate parents had not paid the 2 percent income tax required of all citizens residing abroad. Some citizens were given exit visas only after posting bonds of approximately 150,000 nakfa (\$10,000).

Travel restrictions imposed in 2006 on noncitizens remained in effect. All diplomats, humanitarian organizations, UN staff, and foreign tourists were required to obtain advance permission from the government to leave Asmara. Travel restrictions were enforced at military checkpoints. Travel permission was not a transparent process. While some foreign nationals obtained permission to travel to certain locations, the government refused to issue travel permits to others traveling to the same place. The government often failed to respond to requests for travel authorization.

The government prevented NGO travel by cutting off fuel supplies (see section 5.)

The law has no provisions concerning exile.

The government does not recognize dual citizenship; therefore, all persons of Eritrean descent are citizens. In general citizens had the right to return; however, citizens had to show proof that they paid the 2 percent tax on foreign earned income to be eligible for some government services, including exit visas upon their departure from the country. Applications to return to the country filed by citizens living abroad were considered on a case-by-case basis if the applicant had broken the law, contracted a serious contagious disease, or was declared ineligible for political asylum by other governments.

In August the government halted its repatriation program with the ICRC, preventing the repatriation of thousands of Ethiopians. In 2008 the government, in conjunction with the ICRC, repatriated 1,714 Ethiopians; and 52 citizens were repatriated from Ethiopia.

#### Internally Displaced Persons

During 2008 almost all of the IDPs from the conflict with Ethiopia were permanently resettled, although 1,800 IDP families remained in the Gash Baraka region. The government allowed UN organizations and the ICRC to provide assistance to former IDPs.

#### Protection of Refugees

The country was not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and was not a party to the 1969 African Union Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of the Refugee Problem in Africa. As a result the government cannot provide legal refugee or asylum status; however, in practice the government provided protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The government provided temporary protection to approximately 135 persons from Sudan and 4,300 persons from Somalia on a prima facie basis. Reports indicated that the government provided resources to Ethiopian refugees only if the refugees joined Ethiopian

opposition groups. Ethiopian refugees who did not join opposition groups reportedly were harassed by government officials.

The government required noncitizens to pay an annual fee for a residency card; there was no discrimination regarding nationality. The fee was 500 nakfa (\$34); the card was used to demonstrate that a foreigner was not indigent. If the foreigner could not pay the fee, he was first referred to the ICRC for repatriation. If he refused repatriation, he was incarcerated for 60 days, at which point the cycle began again.

The government systematically rounded up Ethiopians each year around the country's liberation day, May 24. The Ethiopians were held in a camp until authorities verified that they were not indigent. All Ethiopians who were rounded up were released approximately one month after Liberation Day.

### Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The law and unimplemented constitution provide citizens with the right to change their government peacefully; however, citizens were not allowed to exercise this right in practice.

#### Elections and Political Participation

The government came to power in a 1993 popular referendum in which voters chose to have an independent country managed by a transitional government; however, the transitional government did not permit the formation of a democratic system. The government twice scheduled elections in accordance with the constitution but cancelled them without explanation. An official declaration in 2003 claimed that, "in accordance with the prevailing wish of the people it is not the time to establish political parties, and discussion of the establishment has been postponed." Government officials also stated that implementation of the constitution was not possible until the border demarcation with Ethiopia was finalized. In 2008 the president claimed in an Al-Jazeera interview that elections might not take place for another 30 or 40 years. The country was a one-party state. Power rested with the PFDJ and its institutions. At times the government coerced membership in the PFDJ.

Although no political parties operated in the country, citizens living abroad established several political parties. During the year the government continued to call individuals who created or were involved in such parties traitors, rapists, pedophiles, and traffickers.

Women held four ministerial positions in the government: justice, labor and human welfare, tourism, and health. Women also served in other senior government positions, such as mayors and regional administrators.

There was no information on whether members of ethnic minorities were on the PFDJ's Executive Council or served on the Central Council. Some senior government and party officials were members of minority groups such as the Tigre.

### Section 4 Official Corruption and Government Transparency

The law does not provide criminal penalties for official corruption; however, the government often arrested many individuals it unofficially charged with corruption. Those arrested under these charges were never tried in court. The World Bank's 2008 governance indicators reflected that corruption was a problem.

There were reports of petty corruption within the executive branch, largely based on family connections. Judicial corruption was a problem. There were allegations of corruption among military leaders involving illicit trade, the appropriation of houses, and the black market selling of goods such as diesel and cement. Corruption was rife in the passport office, and individuals requesting exit visas or passports had to pay bribes.

Public officials were not subject to financial disclosure laws, and there was no government agency responsible for combating government corruption.

In the past the government seized successful private companies and turned them over to the party or to the government. Individuals were not compensated for these seizures. During the year the government also seized crops and other foodstuffs from individuals and turned them over to the ruling party.

Although the law and unimplemented constitution provide for public access to government information, the government did not provide information to either citizens or noncitizens.

#### Section 5 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

No domestic human rights groups and only four international humanitarian NGOs (Oxfam, Lutheran World Federation, Catholic Relief Services, and Norwegian Church Aid) operated in the country; the government interfered with and restricted their work. Catholic Relief Services began the process of shutting down its office during the year after receiving notification it was not in compliance with government regulations.

The government allowed three ruling party-aligned domestic rights NGOs--Citizens for Peace in Eritrea, Eritrean War Disabled Fighters Association, and Vision Eritrea, Inc.--to operate. All NGOs were required to register with the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare, but international NGOs were required to maintain 30 million nakfa (\$2 million) in a local bank. Many failed to receive government approval under the registration process and were required to leave the country.

In 2008 the international NGOs CARE and Dutch Interchurch Aid closed operations and departed the country, citing obstruction and government harassment. In 2006 the government asked five NGOs--Mercy Corps, ACCORD, Samaritan's Purse, International Rescue Committee, and Concern--to close operations and depart the country, which they did.

In previous years the government permitted only the ICRC to operate effectively, although it limited ICRC operations to repatriation, providing shelter to approximately 500 families displaced by the conflict with Ethiopia, visiting prisons and detention centers where Ethiopians were held, and providing assistance to IDPs. However, during the year the government severely restricted ICRC operations and prevented the organization from repatriating Ethiopians to Ethiopia and from monitoring the conditions of Ethiopian prisoners of war.

Of the dozens of NGO employees rounded up and detained by the government during August 2008 raids on NGO compounds, at least a half dozen remained in detention.

In 2008 the government cut off diesel supplies for international NGOs, UN agencies, and the ICRC. These organizations were able to purchase unrationed gasoline at the market price; however, these restrictions made it increasingly difficult for NGOs, the UN, and the ICRC to visit project sites, implement new projects, or carry out resettlements. At year's end the NGOs continued to be denied rationed fuel.

The government did not permit humanitarian food distribution by NGOs or by the World Food Program (WFP), although it allowed UNICEF to continue its supplemental feeding programs, and supplemental feeding and hospital feeding programs continued under the supervision of the Ministry of Health. By requiring NGOs and UN organizations to obtain permission to travel outside the capital, the government effectively controlled access by relief organizations to the rural areas. The status of school feeding programs was unknown at year's end. The WFP maintained an office but did not have any programs operating in country. UNICEF funded several feeding programs through the Ministry of Education. However, several UN organizations and NGOs cited malnutrition as an increasing concern, one which could not be adequately addressed with the current limited feeding programs.

## Section 6 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The law and unimplemented constitution prohibits discrimination against women, persons with disabilities, and discrimination based on race, language, and social status, and the government generally enforced these provisions; however, during the year the government provided privilege to former "revolutionary fighters" and granted them access to business opportunities, trade imports, and expropriated property from non-fighters.

### Women

Rape is a crime punishable by up to 10 years' imprisonment, while gang rape or rape of a minor or an invalid is punishable by up to 15 years in prison. Sexual assault is punishable by six months to eight years in prison. It was unclear whether spousal rape is illegal. No information was available on the prevalence of rape. Authorities often responded to reports of rape by encouraging the perpetrator to marry the victim.

Violence against women was pervasive. Domestic violence is a crime; however, domestic violence cases were rarely brought to trial, and there were no legal penalties enshrined into law. Women seldom openly discussed domestic violence because of societal pressures. Such incidents were more commonly addressed, if at all, within families or by clergy. The authorities' response to domestic violence was hindered by a lack of trained personnel, inadequate funding, and unsupportive societal attitudes.

Prostitution is illegal but was a serious problem. Security forces occasionally followed women engaged in prostitution and arrested those who had spent the night with a foreigner.

Sexual harassment is illegal; however, cultural norms prevented women from reporting these types of incidents, and no one was charged or prosecuted for sexual harassment.

Couples and individuals maintained the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children, and to have the information and means to do so free from discrimination, coercion, and violence.

The government provided access to contraception and equal access to treatment and diagnosis for sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

Women have a legal right to equal educational opportunities, equal pay for equal work, and equal property rights; however, in practice men retained privileged access to education, employment, and control of economic resources, particularly in rural areas. Women generally did not enjoy a social status equal to men.

The law requires that women from 18 to 47 years of age participate in national service. During the year the government continued efforts to detain female draft evaders and deserters. According to reports, some women drafted for national service were subjected to sexual harassment and abuse.

The National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare, and Ministry of Health were the primary government offices responsible for ensuring legal rights of women. Economic discrimination against women was not a problem, despite the social discrepancies.

### Children

Citizenship was derived from one's parents and from obtaining a national identity card. It was possible to be born abroad to Eritrean parents without being a citizen simply by not applying for a national identity card. There were no known instances of someone being born to Eritrean parents in country and not having obtained citizenship.

Education through grade seven is compulsory and tuition free; however, students were responsible for uniforms, supplies, and transportation, which was prohibitively expensive for many families. Education above grade seven required a nominal fee and was not compulsory. There was a shortage of schools and teachers at all levels, remedied in part by holding morning and afternoon shifts at schools. In rural areas young girls usually left school early to work at home.

The government required all students who reached the final year of secondary school to attend school at a location adjacent to the Sawa military training facility in the western section of the country. Students who did not attend this final year did not graduate and could not take examinations that determined eligibility for advanced education. The remote location of this boarding school, security concerns, and societal attitudes reportedly resulted in many female students not enrolling for their final year; however, women could earn an alternative secondary school certificate by attending night school after completing national service. Many students elected to repeat grades or dropped out of high school after the 11th grade to avoid forced conscription into the Sawa military education.

Boys and girls had equal access to state provided medical care.

There are no laws against child abuse and no government programs to combat the problem. Physical punishment was widespread and socially accepted.

An estimated 94 percent of girls had undergone FGM. Almost all ethnic and religious groups in the country practiced FGM, despite extensive government efforts to curb the practice. In the lowlands, infibulation--the most severe form of FGM--was practiced. In 2007 the government issued a proclamation declaring FGM a crime and prohibited its practice. The government and other organizations, including the NUEW and the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students, sponsored a variety of education programs during the year that discouraged the practice.

The legal minimum age for marriage for both men and women is 18, although religious entities may bless marriages at younger ages. UNICEF reported that 46 percent girls were married before 18 years of age.

There were no known instances of children engaged in prostitution for survival with or without third party involvement. The law criminalizes child prostitution, pornography, and sexual exploitation; however, there were reports that it occurred.

All students spend their final year of high school at the military training camp in Sawa. Attendance at Sawa was compulsory and those who did not attend remain at risk of arrest. Students at Sawa were typically 18 or older, although a fair percentage were as young as 16. The initial three months of school were spent undergoing military training. Students who received poor grades in high school had in the past been sent to the Wi'a Military Camp in lieu of being allowed to complete the academic year.

The law prohibits the recruitment of children under the age of 18 years into the armed forces; however, children under the age of 18 have been conscripted in rare instances. It was not known if rebel groups within the country recruited soldiers under the age of 18.

During the year humanitarian groups and interlocutors anecdotally noted an increase from previous years in the number of street children due in part to an increase in economic hardship. UNICEF funded programs for street children; however, the increase in the number of street children was larger than the impact of programs provided by UNICEF.

#### Trafficking in Persons

The law and unimplemented constitution prohibit trafficking in persons, and there were no reports that persons were trafficked to, from, or within the country by outside groups or individuals. However, the government's mandatory national

service program required citizens to work for indefinite periods of time without promotion or freedom of movement and with inadequate pay (see section 7.c.). Thousands of citizens fled during the year to avoid national service.

The State Department's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* can be found at [www.state.gov/g/tip](http://www.state.gov/g/tip).

#### Persons with Disabilities

The law and unimplemented constitution prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, or in the provision of other state services, and there were no reports of discrimination in practice. The government dedicated substantial resources to support and train the thousands of men and women with physical disabilities that resulted from the war for independence and the conflict with Ethiopia. There are no laws mandating access for persons with disabilities to public thoroughfares or public or private buildings, but many newly constructed buildings provided such access. The Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare was responsible for the rights of persons with disabilities.

#### National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

There were reports of government and societal discrimination against the Kunama, one of nine ethnic groups residing primarily in the west. Societal abuse of Ethiopians occurred, but there were fewer reports of such abuse than in the previous year.

#### Societal Abuses, Discrimination, and Acts of Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Homosexuality is illegal, and homosexual persons faced severe societal discrimination. The government accused foreign governments of promoting the practice to undermine the government. There were no known official discriminatory practices against civilians, although there were uncorroborated reports that known homosexual persons in the military were subjected to severe abuse. There were no known lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender organizations in country.

#### Section 7 Worker Rights

##### a. The Right of Association

The law provides workers with the legal right to form and join unions to protect their interests; however, some government policies restricted free association or prevented the formation of some unions, including within the civil service, military, police, and other organizations providing essential services. The government ran all unions, including the Teacher's Union, Women's Union, Youth's Union, and Worker's Union. Membership in these unions was required. The government did not encourage the formation of independent unions by employees of private businesses. Union leaders were typically government employees, and union activities were generally government sanctioned. The Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare must grant special approval for groups of 20 or more persons seeking to form a union. There were no reports that the government opposed the formation of labor associations during the year; however, the government did not approve the formation of any unions.

The law allows strikes; however, all unions were closely aligned with the government and thus did not exercise or promote the right to strike.

##### b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference, and collective bargaining is allowed. In practice all unions were subservient to the government, which set wages for union workers, employees of PFDJ-owned enterprises, and government employees. Wages were set independently in the small private sector, although workers were not allowed to organize independently.

Since most businesses were government-owned, unions did not experience antiunion discrimination.

The Eritrean Free Zone in Massawa, authorized in 2006 to attract foreign and local investors, was not operational by year's end.

#### c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, forced labor occurred, particularly in national service program.

The government required all men between the ages of 18 and 54 and women between the ages of 18 and 47 to participate in the national service program, which included military training and civilian work programs. However, the criteria for demobilization were unclear, and many were required to work indefinitely in any location or capacity chosen by the government. Reports indicated citizens were enlisted in the national service for many years below minimum-wage rates with no prospective end date, no promotion or salary increases, and restricted freedom of movement since those employed under national service were often denied passports or exit visas. The government justified its open-ended draft on the basis of the undemarcated border with Ethiopia. Some national service members were assigned to return to their civilian jobs while nominally kept in the military because their skills were deemed critical to the functioning of the government or the economy. These individuals continued to receive only their national service salary; the government required them to forfeit to the government any money they earned above and beyond that salary. Government employees generally were unable to leave their jobs or take new employment. Draft evaders often were used as laborers on government development projects.

#### d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

Although the government has a national plan of action to protect children from exploitation in the workplace, it was not enforced effectively, and child labor occurred. The legal minimum age of employment is 14 years. The law prohibits minors from working in transport industries or working underground, such as in mines and sewers. It was common for rural children who did not attend school to work on family farms, fetching firewood and water, and herding livestock, among other activities. In urban areas children could be seen in auto mechanic outfits working in car repair shops. Some children worked as street vendors of cigarettes, newspapers, or chewing gum to supplement household income or at the behest of older children. There were no known instances of forced child labor.

There were no known reports of children engaged in the worst forms of child labor; however, in urban areas children were engaged in auto and bicycle repair or transport of grain/goods via donkey carts. In rural areas children assisted with farming corn, wheat, sorghum, and other grains.

Labor inspectors from the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare were responsible for enforcing child labor laws, but inspections were infrequent, and enforcement of child labor laws was ineffective.

Some of the major programs implemented to prevent child labor included government preschool services in rural and urban areas and academic and vocational training.

#### e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum wage in the civil service sector of 360 nakfa (\$24) per month did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Most persons in national service and the service industry made less than the minimum wage. For instance, police officers earn between 50 and 400 nakfa per month (between \$3.33 and \$26.67). The government did not enforce the minimum wage law.

The standard workweek was 44.5 hours, but many persons worked fewer hours. Workers were entitled to one rest day per week; most workers were allowed from one to one and one-half days off per week. There are no prohibitions against excessive overtime. Citizens are legally entitled to overtime, except for those employed under national service; however, citizens were rarely forced to work more than the 44.5-hour workweek.

The government instituted occupational health and safety standards, but inspection and enforcement varied widely among factories. In practice some workers were permitted to remove themselves from dangerous work sites without retaliation.

During the year there was no known discrimination against foreign or migrant workers, although Ethiopians stated it was difficult to find work and believed they faced discrimination.

\*United States personnel were not permitted to travel outside of the capital of Eritrea, and had very limited access to citizens and government officials in the country. This report draws in large part on non-U.S. government sources.