

## Eritrea

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	ERT98001.ZHN
<b>Date:</b>	16 December 1997
<b>Subject:</b>	Status of Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
<b>Keywords:</b>	Eritrea, Jehovah's Witnesses, Persecution, Military Service

### Query:

What is the current status of Jehovah's witnesses in Eritrea?

### Response:

The RIC Staff researched the current status of Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

According to *Responses To Information Requests* (REFINFO, ERT20418) Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea did not participate in the war and the 1993 referendum for independence. They have also refused to participate in national service. The Eritrean government in retaliation for the above mentioned behavior of the Jehovah's Witnesses had their citizenship revoked in December 1994 and also canceled their passports. The government also dismissed Jehovah's Witnesses from their civil service positions, canceled their business licenses and forcibly closed their schools and shops.

An article appearing in the *St. Petersburg Times* corroborates the government's treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses who are roughly two thousand in a country with an estimated population of 3.2 million. It states that the government stripped citizenship from Jehovah's Witnesses and barred them from holding government jobs or Eritrean passports. The official statement on Jehovah's Witnesses quoted in this article follows.

They disassociated themselves, in body and soul, from the liberation of their country. While the population as a whole was fulfilling its duties as citizens by giving various forms of support, moral and financial, to the cause of liberation, Jehovah's Witnesses acted as disinterested spectators, oblivious to the injustices meted out to their people and their country.

The government of Eritrea commented on the Jehovah's Witnesses issue from its embassy in Ethiopia. In an article appearing in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, the government states that "Jehovah's witnesses could no longer enjoy rights of citizenship because they had repeatedly refused to recognize the state or obey its laws."

A U.S. State Department publication notes that the government of Eritrea continued to persecute Jehovah's Witnesses in 1995. It further states that the group's refusal to vote in the independence referendum or participate in the National Youth Service program -- which entails some military training, prompted the government to take arbitrary punitive measures against them, including eviction from government housing, in addition to measures referred to earlier. The cited articles are attached.

*Last Modified 06/14/2002*