

held down by prison guards and flogged. Throughout the year he was held in solitary confinement for long periods and was denied medical treatment for typhoid fever and emphysema. He was taken to hospital after he became very ill in June, but was returned to prison the following day against medical advice. According to his lawyer, the purpose of Roberto Berardi's arrest was to prevent him testifying before the US Justice Department and other foreign jurisdictions about Teodorín Nguema Obiang's alleged corruption. He remained in prison at the end of the year.

## ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Following Cipriano Nguema Mba's abduction (see above), in January, 11 people suspected of having had contact with him, including two women, were arrested without warrants in Malabo, Mongomo and Ebebiyín, and held incommunicado. Five of the male detainees were released without charge in June. Four of the remaining six people were still detained incommunicado at the end of 2014. In July, the military judicial authorities charged Cipriano Nguema, Ticiano Obama Nkogo, Timoteo Asumu, Antonio Nconi Sima, Leoncio Abeso Meye (charged in his absence) and the two women, Mercedes Obono Nconi and Emilia Aberme Nzo, with "threatening state security and the physical integrity of the head of state". According to their lawyers, they were interrogated without their lawyers present and were not informed of the charges against them.

On 27 September they were tried by a military court, again without their lawyers present. Instead, they were allocated military officers with no judicial training as their legal counsel. Three days later they were convicted as charged. Mercedes Obono and Timoteo Asumu received 15-year custodial sentences, while the other defendants were each sentenced to 27 years' imprisonment.

## PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Agustín Esono Nsogo was released from prison in February 2014, after being held

for 16 months without charge. He had been arbitrarily arrested and detained in Bata in October 2012 after exchanging money with a foreign national and accused of attempting to destabilize the country. His arrest and detention were politically motivated and unjustified.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Equatorial Guinea: Executions just weeks before announcement of a "temporary moratorium" on the death penalty raises serious questions (AFR 24/001/2014)  
[www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR24/001/2014/en](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR24/001/2014/en)
  2. See Equatorial Guinea: Free Agustín Esono Nsogo (AFR 24/015/2013)  
[www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR24/015/2013/3n](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR24/015/2013/3n)

# ERITREA

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## State of Eritrea

Head of state and government: **Isaias Afewerki**

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**No political opposition parties, independent media, civil society organizations or unregistered faith groups were permitted to operate. There were severe restrictions on freedom of expression and association. Military conscription was compulsory, and frequently extended indefinitely. Thousands of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners continued to be held in arbitrary detention, in harsh conditions. Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment was common. Eritreans continued to flee the country in large numbers.**

## BACKGROUND

On 21 January 2013, around 200 soldiers took control of the Ministry of Information in the capital, Asmara, in an apparent coup attempt. The director of Eritrean state television was forced to read a statement on air containing the soldiers' demands, including freeing all political prisoners, implementing the 1997 Constitution, and

putting in place a transitional government. The broadcast was cut off mid-transmission.

In July 2013, the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea observed “emerging fissures within the political and military leadership” in Eritrea. In October 2014, they also reported the continued use of coercive measures to collect the “diaspora tax” (a 2% levy on income imposed on Eritrean nationals living abroad) in a number of countries.

After hundreds of Eritreans drowned while trying to reach the Italian island of Lampedusa in October 2013, four Eritrean Catholic bishops issued a letter in May 2014. In a rare public expression of dissent, they criticized the situation that led so many people to continue to leave the country.

## **PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE**

Thousands of people were arbitrarily detained and held in incommunicado detention without charge or trial for various reasons, including: criticizing government policy or practice; for their work as journalists; for suspected opposition to the government; practising a religion not recognized by the state; evading or deserting national service conscription; or for trying to flee the country, or in the place of family members who had fled. In most cases relatives were not aware of the detainee’s whereabouts. Some prisoners of conscience had been in prison without charge or trial for two decades.

The government continued to refuse to confirm reports that nine of the 11 so-called G15 prisoners - a group of high-profile politicians detained since 2001 - had died in detention from a range of illnesses, as well as a number of the journalists arrested alongside them. There were unconfirmed reports that eight detainees held since 2005/2006, including government officials and medical doctors, were released in April 2014.

## **FREEDOM OF RELIGION**

Only four faith groups were permitted to operate - the Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches, and Islam.

Members of other banned groups, including Pentecostal and Evangelical Christian denominations, continued to be subject to arbitrary detention and torture and other ill-treatment for practising their religion.

## **MILITARY CONSCRIPTION**

National service continued to be mandatory for all men and women aged between 18 and 50, with no provision for conscientious objection. All school pupils were required to complete their final school year at Sawa military camp, effectively conscripting children into the military. The initial 18-month period of service continued to be frequently extended indefinitely, with minimal salaries and no choice over the nature of work assigned - a system that amounted to forced labour. Conscripts faced harsh penalties for evasion, including arbitrary detention and torture and other ill-treatment. Children at Sawa were kept in poor conditions and received harsh punishments for infractions.

## **TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT**

Torture and other ill-treatment was reported to be widely used as punishment, interrogation, and as coercion. Common methods included tying prisoners in painful positions for long periods and prolonged solitary confinement.

Appalling prison conditions amounted to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Many detainees were held in overcrowded underground cells or metal shipping containers, often in desert locations, suffering extremes of heat and cold. Food, water and sanitation were inadequate.

## **REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS**

As of January 2014 UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, reported 338,129 persons of concern originating from Eritrea, including 308,022 refugees and 30,038 asylum-seekers. Around 3,000 people fled the country each month.

Human trafficking networks continued to prey upon Eritreans fleeing the country, including in Sudan and Egypt. Victims were held hostage, sometimes for a year or longer,

and subjected to violence by criminal groups attempting to extract ransom payments from their families. The UN Monitoring Group reported that it had identified a Swiss bank account that had been used to collect such payments.

In April 2014, 266 Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers were released from detention in neighbouring Djibouti and transferred to a refugee camp in the south of the country.

## INTERNATIONAL SCRUTINY

Eritrea faced increased international scrutiny. Appointed to the newly created role of UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Eritrea in October 2012, Sheila Keetharuth presented wide-ranging concerns and recommendations in reports to the UN Human Rights Council in June 2013 and June 2014, and to the UN General Assembly in October 2013 and October 2014. The Special Rapporteur's requests for access to the country have not been granted since her appointment in 2012.

In June 2014, a three-member UN Commission of Inquiry was established for one year to investigate all alleged violations of human rights in Eritrea outlined in the reports of the Special Rapporteur.

# ESTONIA

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## Republic of Estonia

Head of state: **Toomas Hendrik Ilves**

Head of government: **Taavi Rõivas (replaced Andrus Ansip in March)**

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**Legislation allowing unmarried, including same-sex, couples to register their cohabitation was passed. About 91,000 people remained stateless. Few asylum-seekers were granted protection and the number of asylum applications remained**

**low. The government accepted the transfer of a Guantánamo detainee.**

## RIGHTS OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX PEOPLE

On 9 October, parliament passed a gender-neutral Cohabitation Act, due to enter into force on 1 January 2016. The Act allows unmarried, including same-sex, couples to register their cohabitation. It also extends to them many of the rights of married couples, for example regarding benefits. Couples in a registered cohabitation agreement will be allowed to adopt the partner's biological children.

## DISCRIMINATION - ETHNIC MINORITIES

UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, stated that about 91,000 people (approximately 6.8% of the population) remained stateless; the vast majority were Russian speakers. Stateless people enjoyed limited political rights.

Efforts by the authorities to facilitate the naturalization of children born of stateless parents fell short of granting them automatic citizenship at birth, leaving Estonia in breach of its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Ethnic minorities continued to be disproportionately affected by unemployment and poverty, leading to concerns that ethnic and linguistic discrimination could be a contributing factor. Language requirements for employment were reportedly placing ethnic minorities at a disadvantage.

## REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

The number of asylum applications remained low. Approximately 120 were made in the first 10 months of the year, of which some 35 were from Ukrainian nationals. At least 20 people had been granted asylum as of the end of November. There was concern that asylum-seekers could be denied access to asylum at borders and refused entry.