

ERITREA 2020 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Eritrea is a highly centralized, authoritarian regime under the control of President Isaias Afwerki. A constitution, although drafted in 1997, was never implemented. The People's Front for Democracy and Justice, headed by the president, is the sole political party. There have been no national-level elections since an independence referendum in 1993.

Police are responsible for maintaining internal security, and the armed forces are responsible for external security, but the government sometimes used the armed forces, reserves, demobilized soldiers, or civilian militia to meet domestic as well as external security requirements. Agents of the national security service, a separate agency which reports to the Office of the President, are responsible for detaining persons suspected of threatening national security. The armed forces have authority to arrest and detain civilians. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over most security forces. Members of the security forces committed numerous abuses.

The country experienced significant adverse changes in its human rights situation after, according to credible reports, it intervened in the conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia, that began in November. There are credible reports of Eritrean soldiers engaging in unlawful and arbitrary killings in Tigray. There are also reports of Eritrean soldiers engaging in forced disappearance and forced repatriation of Eritrean refugees from Tigray.

Significant human rights issues included: unlawful and arbitrary killings, forced disappearance; torture; and arbitrary detention, all committed by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison and detention center conditions; political prisoners; serious problems with judicial independence; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; the worst forms of restrictions on free expression and the press, including censorship and the existence of criminal libel laws; substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; severe restrictions on religious freedom; widespread restrictions on freedom of

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welfare. The ministry employed 28 inspectors, which was insufficient to the need. The government did not effectively enforce the negotiated standards. The National Confederation of Eritrean Workers reported that every enterprise has an inspection at least once per year, which is then reviewed by the enterprise, the union, and the ministry. Inspectors have the authority to make unannounced inspections and demand changes, but may not initiate sanctions.

Approximately 80 percent of the population was employed in subsistence farming and small-scale retail trading. There were no reliable data on the informal economy and no effective mechanisms for monitoring conditions or protecting workers in the informal economy.

The government did not report information regarding abuses of wage, overtime, safety, or health standards. There was no information on major industrial accidents during the year.